



The Princeton Theological Review

VOLUME XIV, No.1

SPRING 2008

ISSUE 38

THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS

In the End, God: The Proper Focus of Theological Exegesis

Daniel Treier

On Reading Scripture Theologically

Murray Rae

Theological Exegesis and John Howard Yoder

Angus Paddison

Jesus Christ as Humble Lord: Karl Barth and N.T. Wright on the
Philippians "Christ Hymn"

J. Scott Jackson

Seeking 'the Inexpressible Texture of Thy Word': A Practical Guide
to Brevard Childs' Canonical Approach to Theological Exegesis

Dennis T. Olson

Brevard S. Childs' Contribution to Old Testament Interpretation:
An Evangelical Appreciation and Assessment

Richard Schultz

Brevard Childs as Critical and Faithful Exegete

Philip Sumpter

Later Childs

Daniel Driver

The Princeton Theological Review is a student-run, semi-annual journal that exists to serve students within the Princeton Theological Seminary body as well as the wider theological community by providing a resource that challenges, informs and equips them to become more effective and faithful witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is committed to engaging theological issues in ways that are grounded in Scripture, centered on Jesus Christ, formed by the work of the Holy Spirit, and oriented toward the historic confessions and contemporary reflections of the church.

CONTACTING THE EDITORS

Your responses to the materials published in the *PTR* are a critical part of the journal's success. We welcome and appreciate your ideas. Please send all correspondence to:

Executive Editor
The Princeton Theological Review
Princeton Theological Seminary
P.O. Box 821
Princeton, NJ 08542

SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES

If you would like to become a new subscriber, renew your subscription, purchase a gift subscription, make a donation, or change your address, please address your correspondence to the Managing Editor (Subscriptions).

Subscription rates are \$12 for students and seniors, \$15 for individuals, and \$25 for institutions in the U.S. Canadian residents should add \$5 to the preceding rates. All other foreign residents should add \$10 to the preceding rates.

SUBMITTING TO THE PTR

We welcome your contributions for consideration to be published. Please see our call for papers, found on the last page of this journal or at our website (www.princeton theological review.org). We encourage you to submit articles as an attachment via e-mail: ptr@ptsem.edu

If you mail using the U.S. Postal Service, please send a hard copy with a disk to the General Editor at the address above.

All submissions should be in final form.

The *PTR* reserves the right to edit all submissions before publication.

REPRINTING FROM THE PTR

If you want to photocopy material original from the *PTR*, please follow these guidelines: For personal use or use in congregations or classrooms, we grant permission for 50 copies to be made, provided the articles are distributed at no charge and you include the following information: "Copyright (year) (author) Reprinted from *The Princeton Theological Review*."

The Princeton Theological Review is a ministry of the Theological Students' Fellowship. *The Princeton Theological Review* is not an official publication of Princeton Theological Seminary and the opinions expressed in the *PTR* are not necessarily those of the editors, the Theological Students' Fellowship or Princeton Theological Seminary.

The
Princeton
Theological Review

ISSUE 38, SPRING 2008
VOLUME XIV, NUMBER 1

CONTENTS

Prolegomena	Peter Kline	5
In the End, God: The Proper Focus of Theological Exegesis	Daniel Treier	7
On Reading Scripture Theologically	Murray Rae	13
Theological Exegesis and John Howard Yoder	Angus Paddison	27
Jesus Christ as Humble Lord: Karl Barth and N.T. Wright on the Philippians "Christ Hymn"	J. Scott Jackson	41
Seeking 'the Inexpressible Texture of Thy Word': A Practical Guide to Brevard Childs' Canonical Approach to Theological Exegesis	Dennis T. Olson	53
Brevard S. Childs' Contribution to Old Testament Interpretation: An Evangelical Appreciation and Assessment	Richard Schultz	69
Brevard Childs as Critical and Faithful Exegete	Philip Sumpter	95
Later Childs	Daniel Driver	117
Book Reviews		131



PROLEGOMENA

Peter Kline

Recent scholarly and ecclesial discussions about Scripture have invigorated an interest in what has come to be called *theological exegesis* or *theological interpretation*. With no denominational, institutional, or departmental home, this movement (if it can be called such) is both elusive and full of promise. It has brought together circles that often remain apart: Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants, theologians and biblical scholars, clergy and academics; yet the lasting impact on any of these circles remains to be seen. Many (even its advocates) are still asking, what *is* theological exegesis? As of yet, there is no uniform answer, but a minimal definition is possible. Rather than a particular method, hermeneutic, or doctrinal outcome, theological exegetes share a common conviction about the *location* of Scripture: the church. The Bible is not primarily the property of the academy, the culture, or the individual, but of the one Lord who gathers, upbuilds, and sends the people of God. Theological exegesis treats Scripture accordingly; it is discipleship in the mode of reading.

This issue of the *Princeton Theological Review* offers a contribution to the continuing effort to clarify how reading the Bible is a theological task. We are honored to host some of the most insightful advocates and practitioners of theological exegesis around. Promoting careful and passionate readings of Scripture is something the *PTR* strives for in every issue, so we are more than pleased to turn our readers' attention to this subject directly. We also are honored to give tribute in this issue to one of the 20th century's most respected and groundbreaking theological exegetes, Brevard Childs. He is for many a model of faithful Christian scholarship and exegesis, and his recent passing in June 2007 provides us with an opportunity to reflect on and commend his important work.

This issue is divided into two parts. Part I offers reflections on theological exegesis 'in general.' Daniel Treier presents an overview of the current state of theological exegesis, suggesting that, in the end, it is attention to divine agency that makes exegesis truly theological. Murray Rae, through attention to a few biblical texts, offers thoughts on how biblical scholars and theologians can work together to arrive at both theological exegesis and exegetical theology. The key, for him, is sustained attention to Scripture's subject-matter. Angus Paddison takes up John Howard Yoder's reading of Scripture and demonstrates its theological presuppositions and aims. For Yoder, reading Scripture properly can happen only as the church takes up Jesus' summons to follow him to the cross. Scott Jackson compares Karl Barth and N.T. Wright on their respective interpretations of the "Christ Hymn" in Philippians 2. He uncovers many similarities but argues that N.T. Wright offers the more accurate reading.

Part II is devoted to the work and memory of Brevard Childs. Dennis Olson, a student of Childs, provides a "practical guide" to his canonical approach to Scripture. Olson helpfully summarizes what a non-expert can and should take

away from Child's immense output. Richard Schultz, another student of Childs, offers personal reflections on Childs as a well as an overview of evangelical reception of his work. Philip Sumpter presents a guide to the key themes of Childs' work, showing that he was able to fruitfully synthesize critical scholarship with a passionate faith. Finally, Daniel Driver considers development in Childs' work. He contends, against the usual view, that there is an overarching continuity to the whole of Childs' career.

For the Christian church, the Bible is the very Word of God. Mysteriously, Jesus Christ rules his church through the frail and feeble practice of human reading. Here, alongside all other Christian convictions, we encounter "the foolishness of God" (1 Corinthians 1:25). In recent centuries, the temptation for the church has been to shield itself from this foolishness through the construction of elaborate edifices around Scripture: hermeneutical theory, historical-critical tools, theories of inspiration, dogmatic systems, etc. All of these are right and necessary, but it needs to be emphasized continually that the presence of these structures around Scripture does not itself constitute a faithful hearing of the Bible. Proper exegesis is *theological*, attentive to the living and active Word of God, eager to hear and obey the summons of him whose voice is like "the roar of many waters" (Revelation 1:15). It is a happy thing that such a conviction is alive among us today; our hope is that the *PTR* can offer a modest contribution to its growth.

IN THE END, GOD: THE PROPER FOCUS OF THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS

Daniel Treier

Understanding theological interpretation of Scripture requires exploring two complementary perspectives. First, there have been various catalysts for the movement, such as renewed evangelical and Catholic engagement with critical biblical scholarship from the mid-twentieth century onward; the constructive theological criticism of such scholarship by Karl Barth; and hermeneutical trends sometimes labeled “postmodern,” including a focus on community. Other catalysts for theological interpretation of Scripture point us to common themes within the movement: imitating the strengths of pre-critical interpreters such as Augustine; interacting with Christian doctrine, especially the Trinitarian Rule of faith that holds Scripture together around one divine story; and listening to others in the church as the community of the Holy Spirit, in which we are formed as virtuous readers. The first perspective on theological interpretation of Scripture, then, involves a focus on what is held *in common*.

Secondly, though, one must also acknowledge *continuing challenges* on which either the various participants in the movement do not agree or else they have not clearly spoken. One of those concerns, especially for biblical scholars, is whether “biblical theology” has its proper uses and, if so, how it should be pursued. A related concern, perhaps more dominant among theologians and others outside the discipline of biblical studies, is the nature of proper engagement with general hermeneutics. Beyond the academic guilds of the “Western” university, there is still another concern, which to this point has gone largely unaddressed by advocates for theological exegesis: engagement with the various social locations of biblical interpretation, especially in light of “globalization.”

From these two angles—what is held in common on the one side, and what produces continuing tension on the other side—we can gain a fairly clear picture of the movement toward recovering theological interpretation of Scripture. At heart, systematic theology, by whatever name, ultimately concerns relationships between various contexts that affect, and are affected by, biblical interpretation. The goal is not to foist extraneous material on top of biblical teaching, getting in the way of Scripture having its say. Instead, the goal is to ask the right questions—relating various contexts in ways that illuminate the biblical teaching and our contemporary contexts in light of it.

How then can we further sum up the essence of what it means to interpret Scripture theologically? On the one hand, we must acknowledge that its advocates draw contrasts between theological exegesis and business-as-usual in biblical studies as an academic discipline. Theological interpretation of Scripture responds to perceived problems within critical biblical scholarship. However, on the other hand, it should be clear that healthy theological hermeneutics need

not involve denigrating the faithful labors and valuable contributions of biblical scholars. One can advocate theological interpretation of Scripture while making significant use of critical methods or even serving as a biblical scholar. Theoretical disagreements about the nature of proper interaction with academic biblical studies are probably healthy. Moreover, if theological interpretation of Scripture were to define itself simply by opposing certain institutions or trends, it would not long endure. For it would depend on those perceived problems, and as soon as the institutions or negative trends changed, theological interpretation of Scripture would lack coherent identity or positive momentum.

The “Scripture Project” presents nine theses that, to a large degree, could reflect the identity of theological interpretation of Scripture.¹

(1) Scripture truthfully tells the story of God’s action of creating, judging, and saving the world.

(2) Scripture is rightly understood in light of the church’s rule of faith as a coherent dramatic narrative.

(3) Faithful interpretation of Scripture requires an engagement with the entire narrative: the New Testament cannot be rightly understood apart from the Old, nor can the Old be rightly understood apart from the New.

(4) Texts of Scripture do not have a single meaning limited to the intent of the original author. In accord with Jewish and Christian traditions, we affirm that Scripture has multiple complex senses given by God, the author of the whole drama.

(5) The four canonical Gospels narrate the truth about Jesus.

(6) Faithful interpretation of Scripture invites and presupposes participation in the community brought into being by God’s redemptive action—the church.

(7) The saints of the church provide guidance in how to interpret and perform Scripture.

(8) Christians need to read the Bible in dialogue with diverse others outside the church.

(9) We live in the tension between the “already” and the “not yet” of the kingdom of God; consequently, Scripture calls the church to ongoing discernment, to continually fresh rereadings of the text in light of the Holy Spirit’s ongoing work in the world.

As this group acknowledges, however, questions arise for ongoing discussion, and the meaning of statements such as (4), in particular, would be controversial or at least variegated for different advocates of theological interpretation. Moreover, these theses largely reflect mainline Protestant concerns, since, for example, Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants might see (5) as so central to their understandings of Christian faith that it goes without saying.

If we had to narrow the essential theme of much literature on theological in-

1 Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 3–5. The project involved four years of structured conversations hosted by the Center of Theological Inquiry (Princeton, New Jersey); among other participants were Robert W. Jenson, Richard Bauckham, David Steinmetz, Brian Daley, and R. W. L. Moberly.

terpretation of Scripture down to one word, the core concept might seem to be the church. Old and New Testament studies operate as guilds within the university, so that is the public arena which defines their “best practices” and ultimate aims. Theological interpretation of Scripture need not refuse such academic practices, but its ultimate aim is to serve the interests of another public, the church. The literature on theological exegesis further explicates those interests, and the distinctive concerns of the approach they foster in terms of canon, creed, and culture.

“Canon” points to the fact that theological interpreters are not shy about relating particular passages to the larger context of the entire Bible. We need not ignore the historical development of words and concepts, engaging in simplistic, synthetic connections that obscure the particularities of any given text. But neither should we operate as prisoners of alien standards imposed by academic guilds that tend to reject the unity of Scripture or allow passages to relate only on the narrowest criteria.²

“Creed” highlights the Rule of faith as another crucial context for the church’s engagement with Scripture. Narrowly speaking, this entails reading the Bible in light of the Trinitarian and Christological heritage of the early church that became formalized in such symbols as the Nicene Creed. More broadly, this involves approaching Scripture as members of a living tradition stemming from that earlier time period, with the practices and habits of mind that those Christians shared and passed on. Furthermore, confessions or other dogmatic symbols may extend the regulative function of doctrine into more specific churchly contexts. Such a Rule of faith may not determine all of our exegetical decisions, but this creedal context helps us to ask questions of the biblical texts—and perhaps to recognize answers—that we might otherwise miss.

“Culture” involves not only the recognition of the various contexts in which the church has read Scripture—both rightly and poorly—across history, but also the acknowledgment of our own contemporary hermeneutical locations. As noted earlier, the presuppositions of interpreters have often had a bad name in biblical studies; when they are acknowledged, the admission comes grudgingly. Presuppositions are “baggage” to be set aside as much as humanly possible in a quest for “objectivity.” This metaphor points to an alternative, however: baggage usually carries with us that which is essential, not that which we need to get rid of. What if presuppositions are not a threat to objectivity but an aid in preserving it? Indeed, presuppositions can preserve perspectives from outside our time and place and personal subjectivity, bringing them to bear on interpretation perhaps in spite of ourselves. Of course, pre-understanding can be unhealthy if it prevents Scripture from reforming human ideas; Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox believers alike can agree on this point, regardless of their diverse approaches to the relationship between Scripture and tradition. We need to pay attention to the details of biblical

2 Before overemphasizing the dominance of “historical-critical” approaches, it must be admitted that the standards in academic biblical studies are increasingly pluralistic or even incoherent, as treated at length in Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study*, Studies in Theological Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

texts, remaining open to their correction of our perspectives; even so, presuppositions also provide essential points of connection to the true subject matter of Scripture.

Thinking in terms of lenses may provide a useful metaphor. While truth is comprehensive and certain in terms of God's knowledge, human perception involves finite—not to mention fallen—perspectives. Accordingly, at any given time and place we see only partially. Likewise, our reading skills and scholarly methods, even operating at their best, are divine gifts precisely in their particularity: each does some things well, and not others. The very detailed historical and literary lenses of biblical scholarship help us to see vital aspects of truth that we dare not miss. But, used exclusively, they can leave out other dimensions of the reality we are studying. Moreover, sometimes they may obscure those theological realities by fostering a kind of myopia in which we miss the forest for the trees.

Theological interpretation of Scripture uses multiple lenses along the way, but tries to integrate these various perspectives into a coherent vision of who God is and whom that calls us to become in Christ.³ This is the widest angle lens, and it puts biblical interpretation into proper perspective. Historical and literary details may then appear in a different light; furthermore, some of those matters—while fine for scholarly specialists to pursue—may not be materially central for understanding and communicating the message of the texts. For we are studying the Scriptures to know God, not necessarily to sketch the entirety of Paul's social world or to make occasionally impossible choices between subjective and objective genitives.

The motif of lenses also puts interpretative difference and change in a new perspective. Some interpretations are surely wrong, while others are more or less right. But that is not the case with every interpretative difference. In many cases, perspectives might be complementary rather than contradictory, a matter of various lenses enabling us to see different dimensions of the truth. In other cases, when differences do involve contradictions, the interpretations as a whole still may not be entirely right or wrong. For example, Martin Luther's breakthrough regarding Romans 1:17—in which he came to see the righteousness of God not as a frightening divine characteristic, but instead as the gift of a righteous status before God—is exegetically questionable today in certain respects. That text probably does not speak precisely of righteousness *from* God, but rather in some way of righteousness as a truth *about* God. Thus, we could say that, at a certain level of detail, Luther's interpretation seems to be wrong. Yet even today scholars propose a variety of definitions for this divine characteristic and debate them with fervor. If understanding the text's basic theological message depends entirely on a technically precise construal of this phrase, then the church remains hamstrung, unable to reach understanding.

However, stepping back and examining how the phrase fits into the pas-

3 On theological vision see Charles M. Wood, *Vision and Discernment: An Orientation in Theological Study*, Studies in Religious and Theological Scholarship (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985); Daniel J. Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God: Toward Theology as Wisdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

sage's message about God, we see that divine righteousness is viewed much more positively. Whatever it means exactly, it does not primarily focus on divine judgment in the sense that Luther feared. At this broader level, Luther's interpretation seems to be the proper forerunner of some contemporary perspectives. We might then conclude that God's Spirit may have blessed and advanced the church via Luther's breakthrough even if his interpretation will not win the day in every respect for all time. As interpretative lenses zoom in and out, they can be right or helpful at some levels of precision while fuzzy or inaccurate at others.

Reflecting on the activity of God in this way is at the heart of theological interpretation of Scripture. In my view, for the sake of defining this practice, there is an even more important word than "church"—namely, God. Surely the ultimate interpretative interest of the church is knowing God in a holistic sense. The risk of some theological hermeneutics literature, however, lies in neglecting a clear focus on the *divine* activity that is essential for creaturely participation in the realities that the Bible addresses. At its worst, discussion regarding theological interpretation of Scripture risks criticizing academic biblical studies only to substitute instead too much focus on the all-too-human activity of the church. But, at its best, the discussion beckons us to view biblical interpretation from the perspective of how—via the past, present, and future activity of Word and Spirit—Scripture teaches the church to know and love God. Such a perspective requires new attention to Christian community, to be sure; yet such a communal focus must also incorporate acknowledgment of the church's weakness and need for biblical correction.

An alternative image for how various perspectives can truly work together—whether among the Bible's literary genres, through numerous scholarly methods, in different Christian traditions, or possibly between academic biblical studies and churchly interpretative interests—is the use of maps.⁴ A topographical map of London, a guide to its streets, and a layout of its famous Underground, all provide access to aspects of the city and contain a certain level of coherence; yet none of these is absolutely comprehensive in itself, and each, if wrongly used, could be misleading. Of course, not every interpretative difference is merely a matter of complementary maps or lenses; some tensions are in fact contradictions and point to what is simply right or wrong. Yet the analogies of lenses and maps give us various perspectives with which to understand the role of various perspectives.

Speaking of maps complements the metaphor of lenses by reminding us that we are not merely spectators when it comes to Scripture. The image of maps points us to the journey motif that is so important for understanding the church's spiritual life. Theological interpretation of Scripture, in the end, is an essential practice in the Christian pilgrimage of seeking to know God. It is that pursuit by which we endeavor to know where we are going and to catch a glimpse of what it will be like to arrive at our destination. Theological interpretation of Scripture, in other words, offers the maps and requires us to use the various lenses through

4 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), especially 294–99.

which we can envision how to undertake our journey. Because the quest, ultimately, involves deepening love for God and neighbor, its hermeneutical point of orientation is not simply the church. Rather, theological interpretation of Scripture orients the church—in a way that is both profoundly mysterious and very basic—toward seeking God.

Daniel Treier is Associate Professor of Theology at Wheaton College.

*This article is an excerpt from the final chapter of his forthcoming book, **Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice** (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).*

ON READING SCRIPTURE

THEOLOGICALLY

Murray Rae

I. INTRODUCTION

Two questions posed by Alan Torrance and Markus Bockmuehl prompt the deliberations of this paper.¹ The first concerns the manner in which the New Testament shapes or prescribes Christian doctrine; the second concerns the contribution that biblical scholars may make to the formulation of Christian doctrine. Do they merely describe what the Bible says and leave it to systematic theologians to make of that what they will, or does the exegetical task contribute more prescriptively to the doctrinal task?

My intent in this paper, after offering some introductory remarks, is to begin with a narrow focus upon several texts in the Pauline letters, and then gradually to widen our vision to apprehend how these texts are situated within the broader story that the Bible tells. The intention at each stage is to reflect upon how biblical scholars, and systematic theologians too, may take guidance from these texts in formulating Christian doctrine.

The relation between the work of biblical scholarship and Christian theology has been a subject of dispute for several generations now. At the heart of the dispute lie competing views of whether the texts comprising the Christian Bible should be handled by scholars as if they were merely the cultural products of particular communities of religious believers, or whether, on the other hand, they are to be understood, primarily and in ways determinative of a fully responsible reading of these texts, as instruments of God's self-communication. That they are cultural products and reveal as such a great deal about the cultural, historical, and political circumstances of their formation, redaction and transmission is not itself in dispute. The disputed questions concern whether enquiry into their cultural forms, origins, and reception exhausts the possibilities of legitimate scholarly enquiry, or whether a scholarly reading of the biblical materials should in some crucially important way be shaped by the Christian conviction that God speaks in and through these texts.

The intent of biblical scholarship in the first case is simply to speak truthfully about the cultural form, origins, and redactional history of texts as well as their literary and philological features. A theological reading, by contrast, is concerned with the truth of the biblical testimony to the being and purposes of God. The first reader attends to the text and is satisfied when the truth has been grasped about the text itself as cultural artifact. The second reader attends to the text prayerfully because it is there that she expects, above all, to hear the word of God. Read-

1 The occasion was a seminar series at St. Andrews University in 2007.

ing the Bible Christianly may involve the use of scholarly apparatus, but for the Christian reader, the various techniques of biblical scholarship have their place only in service of the prayerful expectation that the voice of God may be heard in and through the words of Scripture. Scholarship may in this case be regarded as a mode of faithful attention to that voice, an attention that properly involves the commitment of one's whole life. Reading the Bible Christianly involves reading it in conjunction with lives of discipleship and worship.²

This does not mean, contra Philip Davies among others, that a Christian reading of biblical texts and scholarly reading of those same texts are mutually exclusive endeavors.³ Christian and scholarly readings are better conceived as overlapping domains. It is certainly possible for scholars to read the Bible without Christian interest or commitment; equally, it is possible to read the Bible Christianly without recourse to the resources of biblical scholarship. My interest, however, is in the third possibility, namely, the scholarly reading of Scripture as a mode of faithful attentiveness to the *viva vox Dei*.

What of the relation between biblical scholarship and systematic theology? There is no doubt that with very few exceptions these two disciplines have become methodologically estranged during the past two centuries. Biblical scholars, including many who otherwise consent to the claims of Christian faith, have largely resisted the intrusion of dogmatic concerns into their scholarly reading of the biblical texts. Meanwhile, systematic theologians for their part have seldom offered any sustained demonstration of their reliance, if any, on the discipline of biblical exegesis. There are notable exceptions to both rules, but the divorce between the two disciplines has been sufficiently pervasive to have prompted in the last couple of decades a growing ferment of protest and a determination amongst younger scholars in particular to reintegrate the tasks of theology and biblical studies.⁴ If that ferment is to bear fruit, then a great deal of energy must be devoted to relearning the skills of theological interpretation of Scripture on the one hand and of exegetical theology on the other. The present paper offers an exploration of these tasks and thus also of what is involved in the Christian reading of biblical texts.

II. THE SCIENTIFIC READING OF SCRIPTURE

Although a vast range of motivations and commitments no doubt lies behind the strategies adopted by biblical scholarship in the academy, prominent among them has been a concern to fulfill the academy's own ideals of scientific method. It has been supposed furthermore that scientific method requires the set-

2 I take the point from A. K. M. Adam, "Poaching on Zion: Biblical Theology as Signifying Practice" in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*, ed. A. K. M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 17-34.

3 See Philip Davies, *Whose Bible Is It Anyway?*, 2nd ed., (London: T & T Clark, 2004).

4 The work of the Scripture and Hermeneutics Seminar and the recent launch of the *Journal of Theological Interpretation* are notable expressions of this effort at reintegration.

ting aside of one's personal commitments and the elimination of all subjectivity from one's enquiries. The tools of historical-critical inquiry in biblical scholarship were readily adopted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a satisfactory means of meeting the perceived demands of scientific method. More recently, of course, postmodernism has cast serious doubt on the pretensions to objectivity and personal detachment that were central claims of modern scholarship. There are other reasons too, however, to question whether detached objectivity and the setting aside of all personal commitments and beliefs are really to be regarded as scientific virtues. As early as the 1920s with his commentary on Romans, Karl Barth contended against the prevailing supposition that "impartial exegesis" was the properly scientific goal of biblical study; he proposed instead that a scientific and truly objective approach requires fidelity to the object under investigation.⁵ Barth's epistemological insight would later receive support from the Scottish philosopher John Macmurray, who insisted that the nature of the object must prescribe the mode of knowing. With respect to the Christian Scriptures, fidelity to the object requires, as John Webster has put it, that "what is involved in reading this text is determined by this text."⁶ That principle requires, then, that we turn to the text of Scripture itself.

III. EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY

In 1 Corinthians 11:23 Paul tells the Christians in Corinth that "I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you." This comment prefaces Paul's account of the institution of the Lord's Supper and signals that the professed authority behind his words is not Paul's own but that of the Lord himself. The appeal to divine authority is a strategy often used by Paul. First Corinthians itself, for example, begins with a reminder that Paul is called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God (1 Cor. 1:1), while the letter to the Galatians begins, "Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead" (Gal. 1:1). The strategy is repeated indeed in all of Paul's letters. That he has received apostolic authority from God is the basis upon which Paul delivers his message to those whom he addresses. This is the Pauline equivalent of the prophetic rubric, "Thus says the Lord." Of particular interest in the Galatian address is Paul's further and unique specification of what apostolic authority means. Apostolic authority is "not from man nor through man" (Gal. 1:1, also 1:11). Apostolic authority does not originate with humanity, nor does the human bearer of this authority add anything to it by virtue of his or her bearing of it. This is not to deny either the realities of contextual particularity that are everywhere evident in Paul's letters or the impact of his own thinking and experience upon what he writes. Paul clearly

5 For detailed discussion of Barth's view see, Richard E. Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), especially 96-100.

6 John Webster, "Reading Scripture Eschatologically," in *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom*, ed. David F. Ford and Graham Stanton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 245-56, 246.

supposes, however, that the “lowliness” of his words (1 Cor. 2:1) are no obstacle to their being “chosen” by God (1 Cor. 1:27-28) to reveal the truth. Indeed, it is solely by virtue of divine election that Paul’s words have any authority.

This, I submit, is a central feature of what the biblical texts have to say about themselves. Fidelity to these texts, accordingly, requires us to reckon with the claim that these humanly crafted and transmitted words are chosen by God to reveal the truth—most particularly, the truth about himself. Paul conceives of the biblical texts as instruments of God’s self-disclosure.

What does “reckoning” with this claim entail? Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians that the claim will not be confirmed by human wisdom, for “the world did not know God through wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:21). There is no human authority to which divine authority is subject. Nor is there any human authority that can confirm the authenticity of Paul’s proclamation. Thus, after receiving the revelation of the Gospel, Paul “did not confer with any human being” (Gal. 1:16). Commenting on Paul’s recognition that divine revelation cannot be subjected to human authentication, Søren Kierkegaard trenchantly observes that when “divine authority is the category . . . there is very little or nothing at all for assistant professors . . . to do.”⁷

The confession that the Bible is the Word of God is, accordingly, an article of faith. It does not issue from exhaustive investigations and testing—that is, from an effort at mastery—but is rather an act of submission, an acknowledgement of something that has authority over us.⁸ Such an acknowledgement appears as foolishness, of course, to a culture convinced that there can be no authority surpassing that of the self. The Christian requirement, however, is not that the biblical claim give way to the demands of the present age, but that there be a conversion or transformation of the self. The biblical concept apposite here is *metanoia*, which includes, not least, the transformation of one’s mind (Rom. 12:2). That transformation takes place under the impact of divine revelation itself according to a logic of personal encounter rather than through deductive reasoning. In chapter seven of book III of the *Institutes*, John Calvin offers a pertinent comment on Paul’s words:

Let this therefore be the first step, that a man depart from himself in order that he may apply the whole force of his ability in the service of the Lord. I call “service” not only what lies in obedience to God’s Word but what turns the mind of man, empty of its own carnal sense, wholly to the bidding of God’s Spirit. While it is the first entrance to life, all philosophers were ignorant of the transformation, which Paul calls “renewal of the mind.” For they set up reason alone as a ruling principle in man, and think that it alone should be listened to; to it alone in short, they entrust

7 Søren Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 34.

8 John Webster identifies four characteristics of this confession of biblical authority in his essay, “The Dogmatic Location of the Canon,” in *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2003), 38-41.

the conduct of life. But the Christian philosophy bids reason give way to, submit and subject itself to, the Holy Spirit so that the man himself may no longer live but hear Christ living and reigning within him.⁹

Consent to Paul's claim that he has received from the Lord what he now passes on (1 Cor. 11:23) is thus to be understood as a further episode in the work of divine self-disclosure.¹⁰ The God of Paul's proclamation commandeers or annexes¹¹ Paul's words to the purpose of making himself known and drawing us to himself.

Although the first demand upon us following the event of revelation is obedience¹²—manifest in the case of 1 Corinthians 11 in faithful celebration of the Lord's Supper—we may also begin to formulate from these materials a doctrine of Holy Scripture.¹³ I understand the task of doctrinal formulation to be the specification of what we take to be true in light of the biblical witness. From the few texts we have surveyed so far, we may say that God is one who addresses us through the instrumentality of human words. We may say further that the words of Scripture are vested with divine authority and are thus to be understood as divine address. There will, of course, be much more to say in constructing a doctrine of Holy Scripture, but the point for now is to notice the decisive move that has been made. Proceeding in the way I have outlined here involves personal consent to what Paul says. Such consent entails that we stand under the same authority that Paul himself stands under, namely the authority of the Word of God. Put otherwise, those who follow such a procedure have begun to read the Bible Christianly. Is this a proper thing for scholars to do while working in a modern academy? It is if one of the central requirements of scholarship is fidelity to the object with which we are concerned. That requirement, incidentally, has a higher claim upon us—especially in the academy—than conformity to what the general academic public can conceive as being true. We must follow the (T)ruth where it (or He) leads, rather than being constrained to follow what is thought to be true by common consent.

It is important to note here that while the acknowledgement of Scripture as the Word of God profoundly conditions the task of reading Scripture, that ac-

9 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, bk. 3, chap. 7, ed. J. T. McNeill and trans. F. L. Battles, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 690.

10 The point is drawn from John Webster, who writes, "The creaturely activity of reading Holy Scripture is an episode in the history of God's revelatory self-giving to humankind." Webster, "Reading Scripture Eschatologically," 248.

11 Commandeering is Eberhard Jüngel's notion developed in *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being is in Becoming*, trans. Horton Harris (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1976), 14. For a description of annexation, see Webster, "The Dogmatic Location of the Canon," 27.

12 On this, see Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, 34 and *passim*.

13 Doctrinal formulation may also be understood as a form of obedience, of course, but it cannot be regarded as the first responsibility of those who have been summoned to discipleship by the living Lord. Worship, for prime example, is one form of obedient response that unquestionably has a higher claim upon us.

knowledge does not take the form of a dogmatic *a priori*.¹⁴ It is consequent, rather, upon attentive engagement with the object and subject matter of Scripture itself. Recognition of the holiness of these texts, of their instrumentality in the divine economy, cannot be secured in advance of an attentive engagement with their content. Such recognition is, *a posteriori*, an act of consent to what the texts themselves claim, as we are seeing with the Pauline epistles.

Let me return then to the texts. As we have seen, Paul himself claims that the authority under which he writes is not his own but that of the Lord, who revealed to him what he now hands on to his readers. In the epistolary prefaces to Romans and to Galatians, Paul specifies more precisely who the Lord is. In Galatians 1:1, for example, God is identified as the one who raised Jesus from the dead. Then, in verse 3 God is identified more extensively as “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.” In the preface to Romans, Paul is concerned explicitly to identify God as the God of Israel who “promised beforehand in the holy Scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:2-4). Here, there is additional material contributing to what we may say in formulating doctrines of God, Holy Scripture, Christ, the Spirit, and salvation. The “we” here refers to those who, under divine guidance and authority, consent to what Paul says, a group from which there is no reason to exclude biblical scholars who work in the academy. Indeed, such scholars may very well contribute to the task of formulating Christian doctrine by, for example, shedding light on how the “God of Israel” is more extensively identified elsewhere in Israel’s Scriptures and on how that same God identifies himself according to the New Testament as the God who raised Jesus from the dead.¹⁵

The prescriptive advice of biblical scholars in relation to Christian doctrine should thus take the following form: “If you desire to speak faithfully of the God of the Bible, this is how you should do it: He is the one who raised Jesus from the dead, who determined, and has seen to it, that we should be set free from sin, who spoke of these things beforehand through the prophets, and so on.” This is prescriptive language. Biblical scholars need not merely describe what the Bible says; they may also prescribe what we must say if our intent is to speak truly of the Bible’s God.

Paul’s epistolary prefaces summarize, of course, a grand narrative that the Bible as a whole variously develops. We may plot several central features of that narrative by taking in a little more of the passage with which we began, 1 Corinthians 11. The passage began, we recall, with a reminder from Paul about the authority under which he stands: “I received from the Lord what I also handed on

14 This is a Barthian point that I take from Burnett, *Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis*, 87. I prefer not to follow Barth, however, in referring to the acknowledgement of Scripture’s authority as a “presupposition.”

15 For further discussion of God’s self-identification, see Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, ch. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

to you.” Then follows the substance of what he has to tell us:

... that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.¹⁶

Several features of this account point to the meal being a Passover meal.¹⁷ In particular, the sequence of actions—taking bread, giving thanks, speaking of its significance, taking a cup after supper and using it to call to mind the covenant relationship between God and Israel—are features of the dominical institution that are strongly reminiscent of the Passover celebrations, and, in agreement with the testimony of the synoptic gospels (Mt. 26:17-19; Mk. 14:12-16; Lk. 22:15), seem to have their most likely setting there. Paul, for his part, has already indicated in 1 Corinthians 5:7—“for our Passover lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed”—that the death of Christ, surely the reference for Jesus’ sayings about his body and blood, is legitimately to be interpreted in terms of the Passover. The Passover setting means that the appropriate frame for interpreting the words of the Lord, handed on here by Paul, is the saving work of the God of Israel. The celebration of the Passover by Jesus and his disciples locates them in Israel’s story about a God who once delivered them from slavery in Egypt. That location is made more explicit still through reference to the new covenant, whose realization one day is a cherished expectation of Israel’s faith (see Jer. 31:31-4).

Whatever is going on here has to do with the God of Israel made known beforehand through his saving acts and through the prophets. Jesus, however, introduces a totally new element into this frame.¹⁸ As he takes the bread, commemorative of the Exodus, and says “this is my body that is for you,” and as he takes the cup and proclaims it to be “the new covenant in my blood,” Jesus is announcing a new and crucial development in the drama of salvation. The startling novelty of Jesus’ commentary upon the traditional Passover gestures is confirmed by his further instruction that the enactment of these things is henceforward to be done in memory of him. The instruction would be blasphemy were it not the case

16 1 Cor. 11: 23b-26.

17 Such features as we find in 1 Corinthians 11 are not enough on their own to establish conclusively that the institution of the Lord’s Supper took place at a Passover meal, but, contra John’s Gospel, I am persuaded by the cumulative evidence to accept the testimony of the synoptic gospels that it was indeed a Passover meal. For a summary of recent scholarship on this matter, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 871-74.

18 I take the point from F. J. Leenhardt as cited by Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 873. The source in Leenhardt is “This Is My Body” in O. Cullmann and F. Leenhardt, *Essays on the Lord’s Supper* (London: Lutterworth, 1958), 40.

that the God of Israel was indeed acting in Jesus to deliver his people from bondage once more and to inaugurate in him the promised new covenant. W. D. Davies writes, "For Paul the Last Supper corresponds to the Passover of Judaism; it is the new Passover . . . eivj avna,mnhsin [in remembrance] is the equivalent of lezeker (לזכור) [remember] . . . of the Haggadah, except that Christ has been substituted for 'the day thou camest forth from Egypt.'"¹⁹

Further connections to Israel's story may also be noted. The "new covenant in my blood," represented by the cup of wine, echoes the words of Exodus 24:8. As the covenant on Sinai was confirmed with the blood of sacrificial animals, the new covenant is now established through the blood of Jesus.²⁰ Some commentators see allusions to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:12 in the words of Jesus, my body given "for you,"²¹ and many draw comparison with the ritual sin offerings of Israel's cult, especially as described in Leviticus 5:8.²²

A great deal more exegetical work may be undertaken on these three verses of Paul's epistle, but enough has been said even in these brief considerations to indicate once more how biblical scholarship contributes to the formation of Christian doctrine. We noted above that the prescriptive advice of biblical scholars in relation to the doctrine of God should take the following form: "If you desire to speak faithfully of the God of the Bible, then you must identify him as the one who raised Jesus from the dead, who determined, and has seen to it, that we should be set free from sin, who spoke of these things beforehand through the prophets, and so on." On the basis of our further reading of Paul, we may now specify additionally that to speak truly of the God of the Bible we also have to identify him as the one who brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt, who delivers his people once more through the work of Jesus Christ, and who establishes his promised new covenant through the blood of Christ. These prescriptive utterances all pertain to the doctrine of God, but equally so to the doctrine of salvation. Biblical scholars tell us that we cannot speak truly of Paul's understanding of salvation, transmitted under divine authority, if we do not speak of the giving up of Christ's own body and blood to the purpose of inaugurating the new covenant with God.

My consideration of these verses serves merely as an example of the procedure here commended. The development of the two doctrines in question will draw, of course, much more widely upon the biblical texts—the evangelists' accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper, for example, along with Paul's own

19 W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1955), 252, cited in Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 874.

20 I take the point from B. Klappert, "The Lord's Supper" in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Exeter: Paternoster, 1976), 520-38, 533.

21 See, for instance, Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 551; Richard Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 198; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 877.

22 See, for example, O. Hofius, "To. sw/ma to/ u`pe.r u`mw/n, I Kor 11:24," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 80 (1989): 80-88; C. Wolff, *Der Erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1996), 265-73.

discussions of salvation elsewhere in his apostolic writings, the broader framework of Israel's narrative of its dealings with Yahweh, and so on. The point, however, is that careful study of the biblical texts, on which endeavor all the resources of biblical scholarship may be brought to bear, enables us to specify that to speak faithfully of the God of the Bible we must speak this way. Then will follow an account of the ways in which God is understood to identify himself and to pursue his purposes through his dealings with Israel, and especially through Jesus Christ. On this basis, and on this basis alone, we may develop a doctrinal rendering of the subject matter with which we are concerned.

IV. ON THE FORMATION OF GOOD READERS

Paul's account of the dominical institution of the Lord's Supper, we have noted, draws upon a theology forged through the centuries-long tradition of God's dealings with Israel in which the promise of a new covenant and the Passover tradition are especially prominent. Further consideration of the details of that tradition will yield further insight, I suggest, concerning the relation between biblical studies and Christian doctrine. The Passover tradition commemorates, of course, God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The manner in which the commemoration is to take place is stipulated in Exodus 12 and is partially repeated in Exodus 13. Here, we find a precedent for Paul's appeal to the authority of the Lord that prefaces his account of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11. Exodus 12 begins, "The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall be for you the beginning of months." Then follows the instructions for the celebration of the Passover. We observe here again the biblical claim that what is set out here in textual form has been received from the Lord and is therefore to be understood as God's communication with the text's readers. That claim can be rejected of course, but, as already noted, consent to it fulfills at least one requirement of scientific inquiry, namely, fidelity to the object with which we are concerned.

We will not consider the detail here of the Passover regulations. I draw attention instead to the instruction that this Passover ordinance is to be undertaken so that Israelite children may know the story of God's deliverance of his people from bondage. "When your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this observance?' you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt'" (Ex. 12:26-27). And again in Exodus 13:8: "You shall tell your children on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.'" "This response," says Brevard Childs, "is not simply a report, but above all a confession to the ongoing participation of Israel in the decisive act of redemption from Egypt."²³ The Passover Haggadah, the liturgy now used by Jews whenever the feast is celebrated, takes up the challenge of proclaiming this redemption to succeeding generations. The children gathered at the table take a central role in the liturgy. It is they who ask the meaning of the various elements of the celebration, and the liturgy itself is directed towards the purpose of assuring all who are gathered that the story here recounted is their story. A pas-

23 Brevard Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 200.

sage "of central importance" in the Haggadah reads:

In every generation let each man look on himself as if he came forth out of Egypt.

As it is said: "And thou shalt tell thy son in that day, saying: It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt."

It was not only our fathers that the Holy One, blessed be he, redeemed, but us as well did he redeem along with them.

As it is said: "And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore unto our fathers."²⁴

I cite this passage as an exemplary instance of what it means to read Scripture in ways that are faithful to Scripture itself. A first point is that the celebration of the Passover involves consent to the authority of the scriptural text. The Word of the Lord given to Moses and Aaron is *obeyed*. That is what consent to authority entails. Second, the Exodus and redemption here recounted "are not to be taken as happenings in long bygone days, but as a personal experience."²⁵ "It was not only our fathers that the Holy One . . . redeemed, but us as well did he redeem along with them." The celebration of the Passover is thus to be understood as an exercise of *paideia*, a process by which persons are formed. Israel's obedience to the text of Exodus 12 and 13 is a central means by which Jewish identity is formed and safeguarded. Who is a Jew? A Jew is one, we may say, who has been delivered from bondage in Egypt and whom Yahweh has redeemed. In continuity with this conception of things, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is likewise an exercise in *paideia*. Remembrance of the events that took place on the night on which Jesus was betrayed is a process by which a people's identity is established and persons are formed. Who is a Christian? A Christian is one, we may say, for whom the Lord took bread, and broke it, and gave it, saying, "This is my body; it is for you." A Christian is one for whom the Lord said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of me." A Christian is one, furthermore, who consents to the authority of these words²⁶ and, in the various forms their obedience may take, "proclaims the Lord's death until he comes."

Returning to Exodus 13, the Israelites are further advised that the observance of the Passover ordinance and the festival of unleavened bread is to be undertaken "so that the teaching of the Lord may be on your lips" (Ex. 13:9). Faithful utterance of the teaching of the Lord is grounded thus in a particular set of practices and in membership of a particular community. Here too, I think, there are salutary lessons for the way in which the reading of Scripture is related

24 Jacob Sloan, *The Passover Haggadah*, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1953), 59.

25 *Ibid.*

26 Recall the point made earlier that consent is manifest in obedience.

to Christian doctrine. Right teaching is related to right practice—the practice of worship, the practice of faithful transmission of that which has been received, the practice of participation in a community brought into being by the redemptive and liberating work of God. A high demand is hereby placed upon those who are concerned for right teaching in biblical studies and theology. Right teaching in these disciplines is not simply an academic exercise. It involves the engagement and formation of one’s whole life. Good reading of Scripture along with good teaching of Christian doctrine requires that we be made into certain kinds of readers.²⁷ God’s employment of the words of Scripture to be an instrument of his own communicative presence, by which process they are made holy, has its goal and essential counterpart in God’s formation of a holy people. Such people are no longer outsiders to the story that Scripture tells. They belong inside the story, having been elected by God to the task of remembering rightly, and proclaiming faithfully, the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt and that work’s consummation in the death and resurrection of Christ. This election is the necessary antecedent condition of readers’ being able to contribute to the task of telling truthfully the story that Scripture tells. The formulation of Christian doctrine, with which we have been concerned in this paper, is one mode of the truth-telling engaged in by the people being formed by God.

The importance of personal formation to the task of reading Scripture is indicated in the plea of the Psalmist in Psalm 119.

Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end.

Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.

Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain (Ps. 119:33-36).

Brian Brock comments on these verses,

The psalmist seeks here to be remade, to become holy, not only or first of all by learning understanding (not exactly an equivalent to reason or assent to true statements), but also by learning to walk a way, or a path, and to be given a delight, a redirection of the affections. The psalmist’s breadth of expression allows us to query the extent to which contemporary theology and exegesis can handle the various aspects of the psalmist’s rounded definition of rationality. Within the scope of the Old Testament, the faithful are depicted as being redeemed in their perception, action, and desire in an interrelated, reciprocally defining form.²⁸

27 See John Webster, “Reading Scripture Eschatologically,” 249.

28 Brian Brock, *Singing the Ethos of God: On the Place of Christian Ethics in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 102.

The psalmist's "rounded definition of rationality" to which Brock refers involves, I suggest, sympathy with the subject matter of the biblical texts. Note that it is the *subject matter* of the texts with which one needs to be in sympathy—not merely their literary form, their philological features, the circumstances of their production, their redactional history, and so on. Consideration of all of these features of texts may yield insight into the subject matter of the texts, but the texts themselves are not concerned with such things. The texts themselves are concerned, as we have seen, with that which has been received from the Lord and that which is now handed on to the text's readers. The texts themselves are directed towards the formation of a people. They are themselves an instrument in the task they specify of telling children what the Lord has done (Ex. 13:8). If the goal of biblical scholarship is to let the voice of the texts be heard, then that voice's character as address and its call to live as children of God must be reckoned with. "Such a project," writes David Yeago, "presupposes that we have reasons to *care* about the judgments rendered in the biblical writings. The Fathers, scholastics, and reformers had such reasons; they believed that when we conform our thinking to the pattern of judgments imbedded in the prophetic and apostolic scriptures, our understanding is illumined by a divine light (Ps. 36:9) and so we come to share the *nous Christou*, the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16)."²⁹

Sympathy with the subject matter of the biblical texts entails a willingness to be conformed to it, to become a rememberer and a proclaimer of Christ's death until he comes. As exemplified in Psalm 119, the mode of prayer is the proper mode in which to seek such conformation, for the work of conforming us to and making us participants in the Bible's story is in fact the work of God. That work is the work of reconciliation, and in this work the Bible itself is instrumental. Reconciliation is achieved through revelation; indeed revelation and reconciliation are, as John Webster has put it, "the self-same reality, viewed under different aspects."³⁰ Revelation is the communicative presence of God under which fallen creatures are restored to fellowship with God. A full account of the matter lies beyond the scope of this paper, but central to our concern here is the biblical mediation of God's communicative presence. In Holy Scripture we are addressed by God. Because we are fallen creatures and alienated from God, the word of God that is issued to us in Scripture will not leave us as we were. It will not leave us as we were, that is, if we are to hear it aright and thus be reconciled to the one by whom we are addressed.

Here, fidelity to the subject matter of Scripture brings us into direct conflict once again with the ideal of detached, objective enquiry, which seeks understanding without our being transformed in the process. Modern epistemology conceives of knowledge as mastery. Immanuel Kant represents well the modern view. The individual subject, possessed of the capacity to think rationally,

29 David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Stephen E. Fowl (Cambridge, MA.: Blackwell, 1997), 97.

30 Webster, *Reading Scripture Eschatologically*, 248-49.

takes hold of the world and determines the categories according to which it is to be conceptually rendered. The biblical authors hold another view, however. For them, human knowing does not arise through domination or imposition but rather through attentiveness to the object. Such attentiveness conforms the knower to what is known rather than the other way around. Thomas Aquinas explains that “all knowing is produced by an assimilation of the knower to the thing known.”³¹ The result is that the knower is not left as she was but is transformed through the knowing process. The knower is made a new person under the impact of the new relation with the object established through attentiveness.³²

V. FAITHFUL READING

Why is all of this relevant to the question of the relation between biblical scholarship and Christian doctrine? I have suggested above that the advice of biblical scholars who seek to contribute to the formulation of Christian doctrine should take the form: “If you wish to speak faithfully of the God of the Bible, then you must say this...” Then they will specify what the Bible itself says about God: “He is the one who brought Israel out of bondage in Egypt, who spoke through the prophets, who raised Jesus from the dead, and so on...” This is the manner in which biblical scholars contribute prescriptively to the formation of Christian doctrine. But these are by no means straightforward claims. They arise certainly from the practice of exegesis, but it takes a certain kind of person to make these claims. They are made in this fashion only by the person who has heard the voice of the One God speaking through Scripture as a whole, by the person who has been restored to fellowship with God and who has learned to recognize his voice.³³ Apart from that transformation, biblical scholars are inclined, as a matter of fact, to emphasize the diversity of the biblical witness and to regard that diversity as subversive of faith in the one God who speaks throughout Scripture.

Philip Davies provides an example of such an approach. In *Whose Bible is it Anyway?* Davies distinguishes between “confessional” and “non-confessional” approaches to the reading of the biblical texts, and recommends that scholars of the non-confessional variety should “refer to ‘Yhwh’ or ‘Elohim’ or ‘the deity’ or ‘the god’ without prejudice as to its existence or character beyond what the text

31 Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, question 1, trans. Robert W. Mulligan, James V. McGlynn, and Robert W. Schmidt (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1994), 6. I am grateful to Francis Martin for drawing my attention to this quotation.

32 I am here repeating a point I have made in a chapter titled “Incline Your Ear So That You May Live: Principles of Biblical Epistemology” in *The Bible and Epistemology*, ed. Mary Healey and Robin Parry (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2007), 161-80.

33 Christopher Seitz has made the same point: “If we do not approach the literature with this basic stance—of estrangement overcome, of an inclusion properly called ‘adoption’—historical-critical methods or a hermeneutics of assent will still stand outside and fail to grasp that God is reading us, not we him.” See Christopher Seitz, *Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 11.

portrays.”³⁴ Later, he suggests that from an *etic* point of view (the word “etic” describes what Davies himself regards as the properly academic approach) “‘god/gods’ can only be approached . . . as *constructions* within a publicly accessible communication.”³⁵ Davies is correct to draw these distinctions between the two approaches, and he provides helpful confirmation that the confession that the one God speaks in Scripture can indeed be made only by a person of faith. That observation contributes nothing, of course, to the question of whether such confession is true. Nor does it settle the question of which approach is the more scientific. What I have tried to show, by considering Paul’s claim to apostolic authority and by tracing the way that claim rests upon Paul’s confidence that the God of Jesus Christ is the same God who spoke through the prophets, is that the confession that the voice of the one God is heard throughout Scripture is consistent with the way at least one writer of scriptural texts understands Scripture itself. One could develop the argument, I suggest, through any number of biblical starting points, and by adducing the words of almost any biblical writer. Hebrews 1:1 with its confession that “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” is but one of the more explicit cases in point. Those who would speak faithfully of the God of the Bible, I submit, are bound to speak like that.

Following the lead of Alan Torrance and Markus Bockmuehl, who ask the role that biblical scholars may play in the task of formulating Christian doctrine, I have, in this paper, directed my remarks in the main to biblical scholars themselves. But there is a corollary for systematic theologians that must not be overlooked. Just as biblical scholars, who recognize the voice of the One God in the biblical texts may contribute to the task of doctrinal theology by specifying that “if you want to speak faithfully of the God of the Bible then you must speak like this,” so those engaged in the task of doctrinal theology are not free to fashion words about God in any way they choose. They stand, rather, under the authority of the biblical texts and have reason to speak doctrinally only as they are attentive to what those texts say. Theological exegesis and exegetical theology, accordingly, are twin modes of fidelity to the biblical texts themselves.

*Murray Rae is Senior Lecturer in Theology at the University of Otago,
New Zealand.*

34 Davies, *Whose Bible Is It Anyway?*, 15.

35 *Ibid.*, 81; my emphasis.

THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS AND JOHN HOWARD YODER

Angus Paddison

(1) INTRODUCTION: THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS

What is distinctive about *theological* exegesis? At the very least two responses to this question can be sketched. After setting out these orientating principles, I will proceed to investigate John Howard Yoder's reading of Scripture.

First, theological exegesis of Scripture is exegesis formed by its determined concentration on Jesus Christ—put to death on a Roman cross, resplendent in his riseness, now exalted and seated “at the right hand of God” (1 Peter 3.22¹). Second, theological exegesis is a particular activity directed to the church, a people called and summoned into fellowship by the vivifying Word.²

Stating that theological exegesis is *formed* by its object of attention fittingly recognizes Christ as ruling, lively, and active in our exegesis. In the words of P.T. Forsyth, “we never do the Bible more honor than when it makes us forget we are reading a book, and makes us sure we are communing with a Savior.”³ It is he who is the norm because Scripture is a series of texts that constellate around him; reading that does not recognize this represents a form of *misreading*. “It is they that testify on my behalf” (John 5.39). Putting this in slightly more polemical terms, theological exegesis is distinct from that kind of exegesis which goes about its business in a manner unruffled by the convulsive reality of Jesus Christ and then, only at the end, adds some religious or spiritual hue to its endeavors. Rather than moving from the general to the particular, theological exegesis starts from—or better, is rooted in (with all the appropriate organic connotations)—a quite particular province of activity.⁴

Theological exegesis is shaped all along the line by the englobing reality—the God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ—that is quite properly its permanent distraction. In this distinctive sphere theological exegetes are keenly aware that no

1 All Scripture citations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

2 John Webster, “Hermeneutics in Modern Theology: Some Doctrinal Reflections,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 (1998): 307-41 and “Resurrection and Scripture” in *Christology and Scripture: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Andrew T. Lincoln and Angus Paddison (London: T&T Clark International, 2007), 138-55 are important stimuli for the thoughts articulated here, although there are important points of divergence.

3 P.T. Forsyth, “The Evangelical Churches and the Higher Criticism,” in *The Gospel and Authority: A P.T. Forsyth Reader*, ed. Marvin W. Anderson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1971), 48.

4 See Craig Carter, *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), 240.

reading of Scripture (indeed no account of Scripture itself) is intelligible or even possible apart from offering an account of Christ and those other inter-related doctrinal *loci*—not least the church, the Spirit, God’s revealing activity, and the Christian life. As an invitation to see—not to make—these connections, theological exegesis is one more reminder that “all *loci* of theology are interconnected as nodes of an intricate web.”⁵ To be precise, Jesus Christ is not merely the one to whom theological exegetes direct their attention. As Alpha and Omega, he himself decisively constitutes the nature of our reading and understanding, shaping its very form and temper.⁶ God “in Christ always leads us” (2 Corinthians 2.14), not least in our reading of Scripture. The cheerful remit of theological exegesis is to follow, through the implications of Jesus’ lordship for scriptural reading, the irrepressible assurance that our reading of Scripture is permanently fixed within the gaze of the one who is “more real than any of us.”⁷

Locating theological exegesis as an activity *directed* principally to the people of God is a reminder that apart from this community—which in its gathering, its worship, and its deeds confesses Jesus’ lordship—theological exegesis makes no sense. Theological exegesis is caught up in a series of lives, commitments, and practices from which it cannot be easily disentangled. In the same manner that we cannot do “ethics for everyone” because distinctive Christian practices of truth-telling, sin-naming, and peace-bearing “do not make sense in the context of unbelief,” so too theological exegetes cannot presume to do exegesis for everyone.⁸ The problem with models that begin with a stance that presumes to speak to “everybody” and only then contract to speak in religious tones for particular communities is that they ignore the non-negotiable location of Scripture within the reconciling activity of God and the gospel-constituted community. At the risk of the blushes of not a few colleagues embarrassed at such seemingly parochial attention, theological exegetes assert that Scripture’s first and last destination is the worshipping church in whose life it has a ministry in shaping Christian action and practices. Alongside the insistence that Christian reading of Scripture is ruled and guided by Christ stands the reminder that the church’s performance is a necessary accompaniment to faithful reading of Scripture. In this setting, to ask whether the church’s deeds of sin-naming, truth-telling, peace, and reconciliation flow from

5 Robert Jenson, “The Church and the Sacraments,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 207. Cited in Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 2. On this page Hauerwas faithfully speaks of theology “discovering” connections.

6 The recent work of David Gibson, “Reading the Decree: Exegesis, Election and Christology in Calvin and Barth” (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 2008) establishes this point splendidly in relation to Karl Barth. I hope this work will soon be published and available to a wider audience.

7 Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 89.

8 John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 110.

reading Scripture or following after Christ is to betray a host of mistaken premises. The line between discipleship and scriptural reading cannot be as neatly drawn as those outside the community of the reconciled might suppose.

Those readers aware of some of the recurring themes and emphases in the work of the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder (1927-1997) will be relieved to know that it is not the intention of this essay to match up Yoder miraculously to the particular responsibilities of theological exegesis just set out, as if to show that what I think is really the same as what he thought. Indeed, I rather suspect that Yoder would have been either suspicious or impatient (perhaps both) with some of the strains articulated above. Not least, he is much more circumspect in response to the presumed importance of historical criticism.⁹ Nevertheless, the sketch above can remind us that when examining a theologian's reading of Scripture, such studies cannot wander far from understanding their grasp of the nature of Scripture itself, Christ, and the church (not least so we avoid reductionist talk of theologians "using" Scripture). Having suggested something of the shape of theological exegesis, we can turn now to Yoder, tracing and pursuing his patterns of scriptural reasoning.¹⁰

(2) YODER AND SCRIPTURE

It is not uncommon to encounter high praise for Yoder's exegesis. Duncan Forrester acclaims it as "often fresh, imaginative, and penetrating," while Stanley Hauerwas writes ruefully that he wishes he "could be as competent a scriptural reasoner as Yoder was."¹¹ While many theologians and ethicists exert relatively little labor on the actual reading of Scripture and its claims, the same cannot be said of Yoder, onetime Professor of Theology at Notre Dame and committed pacifist. Aside from his justly-influential *Politics of Jesus*, published in 1972 and lightly augmented in 1994, Yoder's other work evinces a constant, thorough atten-

9 John Howard Yoder, "Armaments and Eschatology," *Studies in Christian Ethics I* (1988): 47, where he says irenically that locating texts in their original context is "neither quite as novel nor quite as productive of new wisdom as some of its advocates believe, nor quite as destructive as others fear." Whilst Yoder is very respectful of historical criticism, in practice the reconstruction of "what really happened" behind the texts plays little part in his theological exegesis. Yoder is certainly not distracted with issues of historical verification, knowing that there is no place to stand other than his location in the confessing community. See Carter, *Politics of the Cross*, 102.

10 The keen reader of Yoder will notice that at some points I unpick the threads of Yoder's scriptural reasoning, and that at other points I develop Yoder's scriptural reasoning. These are movements that we should be wary of separating too neatly, not least if we are to enter into the same kind of thinking which Yoder evinces.

11 Duncan B. Forrester, "John Howard Yoder (1927-1997)," in *The Teachings of Modern Christianity on Law, Politics and Human Nature*, vol. 1, eds. John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 482; Stanley Hauerwas, foreword to Carter, *Politics of the Cross*, 10. For a more uncharitable evaluation, see J. Budziszewski, *Evangelicals in the Public Square: Four Formative Voices on Political Thought and Action* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 87-121.

tion both to Scripture and the reality of God's rule that it seeks to make known.¹²

Put boldly Yoder reads Scripture as the story of the people of God, allowing the realism of this story a more decisive status than the realism with which Christians are told to view their responsibilities to the world. As a Christian theologian and ethicist, Yoder has no hesitation in thinking through and with Scripture. So, according to this line of thinking, the Old Testament recounts a people who place their trust in God. The Genesis story of Babel is read as a reminder that God is not against diversity or community-dependent language, but rather is against the descent into babble—the denial that one can talk across these communities. Jeremiah, an important Diaspora voice for Yoder, speaks of seeking the welfare of the city in which exiles find themselves (Jeremiah 29.7).¹³ Paul, armed with a gospel that he takes to the Gentiles, reveals the importance of cross-cultural communication.¹⁴ Yoder reminds us that the most cited Old Testament verse in the New Testament is Psalm 110.1, “The Lord says to my lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool,’” and on this basis contends that the New Testament points to Christ's reign over the powers and principalities of the world (Philippians 2.10; Colossians 2.15).¹⁵ The New Testament reveals not just Christ's rule, but also how Christians are to live as servants in the world as those who know that the cross is the key to history. Hence, both the Old Testament (including the “holy wars,” which Yoder reads as an instance of Israel's trust in God) and the New Testament speak of a people “not in charge,”¹⁶ a stance which is central to Yoder's pacifism and his analysis of those ways of thinking that have persuaded Christians to believe participation in war to be “responsible.” Far from Scripture being a decorative addition to Yoder's work, far from piously nodding at texts he feels he ought to include, Scripture plays a constitutive role for how and what Yoder thinks as a follower of Christ.

But we would be disappointed if we turned to Yoder looking for extensive and elaborate doctrines of Scripture. Yoder does not rush to offer an a priori theory of the biblical text or of biblical authority. Indeed, he frequently expresses exasperation at evangelical approaches that variously reduce Scripture to a dull

12 Amongst the more important resources, see John Howard Yoder, *To Hear the Word* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001); *He Came Preaching Peace* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985); “Ethics and Eschatology,” *Ex Auditu* 6 (1990): 119-28.

13 John Howard Yoder, “See How They Go with Their Face to the Sun,” in *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 51-78.

14 Jeremiah remains a much more important example for him than do well-worn readings of the exodus. See John Howard Yoder, “Exodus and Exile: The Two Faces of Liberation,” in *Readings in Moral Theology No. 4: The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology*, eds. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 337-53.

15 John Howard Yoder, *Discipleship as Political Responsibility*, trans. Timothy J. Geddert (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 19.

16 John Howard Yoder, “On Not Being in Charge,” in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, eds. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs (London: SCM, 2003), 168-79.

set of propositions, are distracted by issues like textual infallibility, or suppose that the meaning of Scripture is perspicuous. There is, Yoder notes, a tendency for those with high views of the biblical text to have a low view of what they can learn from re-reading the text.¹⁷ The Bible for Yoder is important for the function it has in churches of discernment and performance, not for any presumed textual properties. Yoder's motivations here are a combination of his well-advertised suspicion of methodology, a corresponding wariness of overly-wrought hermeneutical models, and a misgiving that talk of hermeneutics often marks little more than the evasion of following Jesus in his ways of non-violence.¹⁸ When one is rooted in a community that reads the canon as authoritative, it simply is not helpful, in Yoder's view to reflect on why Scripture has authority.¹⁹ Yoder's mode of reading is therefore self-confessedly modest and particular in scope, simply "taking the texts as they stand, for what they seem to want to say, about the shape of the shared life of the first Christians, holding to a necessary minimum the concern any academic has with getting the preliminaries right."²⁰

More important than establishing with what principles to begin or imposing an interpretive grid upon the texts is "the confession of rootedness in historical community."²¹ Within this setting Scripture has a quite specific ministry of helping the church to ascertain whether its life is faithful to its original commission.²² Scripture is thus replete with resources for "critique and renewal"; the primary gap between it and us is one of moral performance.²³ Yoder's positioning of Scripture as a text of remembrance, a text reminding the church constantly that we do not do what it says, is the closest he comes to offering what we might call an ontology of Scripture. This text, transmitting the church's collective memory,

17 John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (Elkhart, IN: Co-Op Bookstore, 1983), 425.

18 Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 62: "The real issue is not whether Jesus can make sense in a world far from Galilee, but whether—when he meets us in our world, as he does in fact—we want to follow him."

19 Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 77.

20 John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2002), 11.

21 Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 7.

22 With this ministry in mind, Yoder often expresses appreciation for Krister Stendahl's distinction between what the Bible "meant" and what it "means," an upbraiding reminder that what the church thinks Scripture presently means may not accord with the text's original intent. Scripture's role of testing the church's faithfulness has implications, as we shall see further, for Yoder's understanding of the relationship between Scripture and subsequent doctrine. Yoder remains suspicious of notions of doctrinal orthodoxy, as if our faithfulness could be assured by being carried along within a tradition. See John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002), 179: "Faithful theology is not simply a matter of being in a stream that comes from the beginning. It is rather the process within that stream of calling it to judgment, checking, and testing it with the origin, of going back to where we came from to see where we got off track."

23 Yoder, *Body Politics*, 59.

reaches “back again to the origins,” an event which has the capacity to re-shape and guide the church’s journeying.²⁴ Reaching back to biblical texts is a reaching back to the foundational event that is Jesus’ life and ministry. Describing reading as a “looping back” to this foundational event is a reminder that tradition and the church’s reading of Scripture cannot be understood as constant, assured growth like a tree, but rather is “like a vine: a story of constant interruption of organic growth in favor of a pruning and a new chance for roots.”²⁵ In the original vision of the Anabaptists, this is not, Yoder quickly emphasizes, a naïve primitivism.²⁶ It is not a return to “GO,” as if we could flee from our historicity.²⁷ The movement is not ultimately back, but forward in the light of the church’s foundational narrative.²⁸ In this sense Scripture “is the collective scribal memory, the store *par excellence* of treasures old and new.”²⁹ The theologian’s job is simply to point to new treasures which might be heard afresh in our present context.

Rather than reading the New Testament as an ethical textbook replete with isolable precepts, Yoder’s attention remains fixed neither on Jesus’ “words without the work nor the work without the words.”³⁰ The New Testament shapes Christian moral action not first because we follow its various imperatives but because we heed its “proclamation of a new social possibility of the human story.”³¹ Accordingly, the burden of Yoder’s attention to Jesus in *The Politics of Jesus* falls not on his teaching, but on the shape and form of Jesus’ life. It is this life—as it reveals the very character of God and the way of the cosmos under God’s rule—which fills in and gives structure to the Sermon on the Mount.³² Jesus’ life encloses the Sermon within “the good news of the new world that is on the way in the power of the God who forgives and restores.”³³ One way of understanding this is to realize that bids to Christianize society by applying precepts that we imagine to be universally accessible is a form of forgetting that biblical precepts are intelligible

24 Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 70.

25 *Ibid.*, 69.

26 Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 136, wryly notes that even the fundamentalist is committed to doctrines and teaching that originated in later centuries.

27 Yoder, *Jewish-Christian Schism*, 138.

28 John Howard Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 41 (1967): 302.

29 Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 31.

30 John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 133.

31 John Howard Yoder, “The Prophetic Task of Pastoral Ministry: The Gospels,” in *The Pastor as Prophet*, eds. Earl E. Shelp and Ronald H. Sutherland (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985), 84.

32 See also John Howard Yoder, “The Political Axioms of the Sermon on the Mount,” in *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 34-51.

33 John Howard Yoder, “Jesus—A Model of Radical Political Action,” in *Faith and Freedom: Christian Ethics in a Pluralist Culture*, eds. David Neville and Philip Matthews (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2003), 164.

only by attending to the shape and pattern of Jesus' life and the people who this particular life makes possible—the church. Yoder does not then tire of reminding readers that he is not obedient to a series of rules in a book, but to a person.³⁴ Nor does Yoder neglect to reinforce “the thickness of the narrative of the Gospel as a new social style.”³⁵ Put simply, pacifism is less a conformity to a series of precepts and more a responsive conformity to the form of Jesus' non-violent life.

Yoder's theology is a powerful reminder that something has gone awry in our theological work if, when speaking of Christ, our attention is not directed towards the *human* Jesus of the Gospels. Yoder's energy, therefore, does not fall on exploring how the Jesus of the Gospel accounts is fully divine. Indeed, as indicated above, Yoder would regard those who only read Scripture “as validation for the corpus of orthodox dogma that claims to be its marrow” as misdirecting their energy and ignoring the corrective function of Scripture.³⁶ In *The Politics of Jesus* Yoder reads the Bible in line with this corrective function by recovering the significance of the human Jesus of the Gospels (especially Luke) for social ethics. This, Yoder says, makes him more, not less, truly Chalcedonian, for he is more committed to the authoritativeness and decisiveness of Jesus' humanity than is often made clear in “orthodox” theology.³⁷ To be precise, it is what the human Jesus *does* in the course of his narratively-rendered life that absorbs Yoder's interest rather than the mere incarnation, “salvation by birth” as Yoder tartly describes this tendency.³⁸ The humanity of Jesus is not *by itself* what saves humanity—but rather the “encounter between God and humanity.”³⁹ However, as tempting as it might be to see Yoder's stated respect for Chalcedonian Christology as a mere doffing of the cap, the more pressing task is to heed Yoder's charge that it is Chalcedonian Christians as they aligned themselves with the ruling powers (loosely, what Yoder labels “Constantinianism”) who ended up paying scant attention to the humanity of Jesus and the kind of life he led. Rendered in dogmatic terms, what Yoder is reminding us is that *the same one* confessed as “Lord” is the human Jesus of Nazareth; it is in this context that we must pay renewed attention to what Jesus

34 John Howard Yoder, “The Way of the Peacemaker,” in *Peacemakers in a Broken World*, ed. John A. Lapp (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969), 118; “A Christian Perspective,” in *The Death Penalty in America*, 3rd edition, ed. Hugo Alan Bedau (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 371: “If there were no Ten Commandments and no Sermon on the Mount, what we know about Christ's life, death and Resurrection still would suffice to sanctify human life.”

35 John Howard Yoder, “War as a Moral Problem in the Early Church: The Historian's Hermeneutical Assumptions,” in *The Pacifist Impulse in Historical Perspective*, ed. Harvey L. Dyck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 95.

36 John Howard Yoder, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War and Other Essays on Barth*, ed. Mark Thiessen Nation (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2003), 171.

37 For a sympathetic account of Yoder on this question, see Alain Epp Weaver, “Missionary Christology: John Howard Yoder and the Creeds,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 74 (2000): 423-39.

38 Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 220.

39 *Ibid.*

said and did.⁴⁰ Yoder's attention is firmly on *who* Jesus is and *what* he does, an attention that does not seek to detract from Jesus' divinity. As Yoder states,

The doctrine of the two natures of the Divine Son, enshrined in the formulae of Chalcedon, has come to be a metaphysical puzzle. Yet what these notions originally meant, and should still mean, is that God takes history so seriously that there is no more adequate definition of God's eternal purposes than in the utterly human historicity of the Jew Jesus.⁴¹

For Yoder, the doctrines that we use to plot the shape and saving efficacy of Jesus' life—incarnation, Jesus' sinlessness, justification, resurrection, ascension—are filled out by attending to the historicity of Jesus.⁴² Correspondingly, Yoder resists reading such incidents in Jesus' life as the temptations in the wilderness, his struggle in Gethsemane, or the cross as mere foils for speculating how the divine and human natures in Christ jostle alongside one another. The voice heard at Jesus' baptism declaring Jesus' sonship is not an ontological pronouncement but states clearly the commission that brands Jesus' life.⁴³ It is a commission that is distinctly political and will push Jesus to wrestle with exactly what kind of political action he is to embody. Throughout his life, Jesus is tempted to seize the levers of history rather than undergo the way of suffering obedience to the Father. In the wilderness Satan tempts Jesus with worldly dominion, but Jesus' resistance to the power offered him shows that the agency of the state and obedience to God cannot be merged, not even in the person of the Son.⁴⁴ In Gethsemane Jesus is not wrestling with two wills or his fear of death, but he is tempted finally with the option of armed Zealot insurrection. However, in treading the way of the cross and resisting the opportunity to engage his enemies on their own "terrain," he ultimately denudes them of their power.⁴⁵ For Yoder, the sinlessness of Jesus is something best understood on the basis of the timefulness of Jesus' life. Just as in the temptations Jesus refused to violate human freedom by forcing people to believe in him through displays of worldly power, so too his obedience all the way to the cross speaks of a sinlessness that is willing to "go the whole way to save us *within* our freedom."⁴⁶

Underlining themes we have seen before, Yoder insists that Philippians 2.5-11 does not primarily invite us to look at the relationship between Christ's divine and human natures. Rather than being a meditation on "essences" and "substances," the text points to the cross as a demonstration that Jesus is "willing to suffer

40 John Howard Yoder, "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of Christ and Culture," in *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, with Glen H. Staasen and D.M. Yeager (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 68.

41 Yoder, "Prophetic Task," 98.

42 Yoder, *Discipleship as Political Responsibility*, 54.

43 John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 30.

44 Yoder, *Discipleship as Political Responsibility*, 31.

45 Yoder, *Jewish-Christian Schism*, 175.

46 Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 311.

any loss or seeming defeat for the sake of obedience.”⁴⁷ The hymn is not indicating Jesus’ descent from an exalted status to a humble status and then his re-ascent to the exalted status he had before. Yoder instead reads the hymn as dwelling seriously on Jesus’ humanity. “His way to be godlike was human-like.”⁴⁸ In being perfectly human, Jesus was humanity and divinity in perfect communion, obedient all the way to the “concreteness” of a Roman cross, where the powers were defeated.⁴⁹ Jesus did not grasp at divinity or try to wrestle free from the limitations of creatureliness, and so Jesus “was not Lord before in the same sense that he is now Lord.”⁵⁰ In this setting the cross is not aligned with doctrines of propitiation but is instead “a political alternative to both insurrection and quietism.”⁵¹ When Jesus “counted equality with God not a thing to be seized hold of” (Philippians 2.6; Yoder’s translation), he was not slipping out of his divine skin but was renouncing the opportunity to direct events and move history down “the right track.”⁵²

It is usually at this point that some readers of Yoder start becoming anxious at his alleged lack of commitment to realism and ontological categories.⁵³ Such fears are, however, misplaced. Yoder may not often adopt the language of “natures” in relation to Christ, but that is no indication that he is not a realist. The New Testament practices such as forgiveness and economic sharing which Yoder urges the church to embody are responses only to the “new world reality” made possible by the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.⁵⁴ Significant here is Yoder’s insistence that 2 Corinthians 5.17 is not to be translated, “If anyone is in Christ there is a whole new creature,” but “If anyone is in Christ there is *a whole new world*.”⁵⁵ Jesus’ acceptance of his death on a Roman cross was more than just resigned submission, and it certainly was not an instance of misfortune. It was nothing less than “an ontological decision, dictated by a truer picture of what the world really is.”⁵⁶ Correspondingly, discipleship is more than merely imitation of an inspiring teacher: disciples of Jesus are working with “the

47 Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 147.

48 Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace*, 91.

49 Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 162.

50 Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 86.

51 Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 43. See also, “Way of the Peacemaker,” 120: “The cross of Christ was a clear, expectable, predictable, normal result of a fact that in a world that did not want His kind of man around He was God’s kind of man, teaching God’s truth and living God’s kind of life right in the middle of a society that could not stand for it. That’s why He was put to death.”

52 Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 242.

53 A. James Reimer, “Theological Orthodoxy and Jewish Christianity: A Personal Tribute to John Howard Yoder,” in *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honour of John Howard Yoder*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 430-49.

54 Yoder, *Jewish-Christian Schism*, 72.

55 Yoder, “There is a Whole New World: The Apostle’s Apology Revisited,” in *To Hear the Word*, 9-27. Emphasis in original.

56 Yoder, “The Prophetic Task,” 91.

grain of the universe.”⁵⁷ Yoder is quite emphatic that the early Christians’ confession of Jesus Christ as “Lord” is a statement that is about nothing less than “the cosmos, the way the world really is.”⁵⁸ Indeed, he even says that the confession of Jesus’ lordship is not so much a statement about Jesus’ *person* as it is about the cosmos.⁵⁹

This cosmic understanding of Jesus’ work is to a large extent resourced by Yoder’s attention to the New Testament’s apocalyptic literature. Yoder resists reductionist accounts that locate apocalyptic texts psychologically as a response to a persecuted or marginalized status. Neither, of course, does Yoder read apocalyptic literature as a neat timetable for future events. Far better to read Revelation in line with its liturgical intentions:

The biblical seers were not compensating for desperation—at least they did not say they were. They said they were engaging in doxology, restating in a new setting their proclamation of the resurrection. They were testifying that the powers of oppression were swallowed up in God’s larger story, whereas our modern explanations try to do it the other way ‘round, by subsuming God talk in our own visions of human dignity and therapy.⁶⁰

This identification of Revelation as liturgical literature can be linked helpfully to Yoder’s affirmation in *The Priestly Kingdom* that worship offers the opportunity for “the communal cultivation of an alternative construction of society and of history.”⁶¹ Singing the hymns in Revelation was, for the community that first sang them, a form of “performative proclamation. It redefines the cosmos in a way prerequisite to the moral independence which it takes to speak truth to power and to persevere in living against the stream when no reward is in sight.”⁶²

The apocalyptic worldview knows that the cross, not worldly rulers (elected or otherwise), holds the key to the movement of history. Whilst people in positions of power justify violent actions by pointing to the results that will follow, apocalyptic people, although powerless in worldly terms, know that time is held sway by the cross and empty tomb. The chief value of apocalyptic literature for Yoder is that it launches an assault against those dominant strains of ethical thinking that reason consequentially, presuming that the result of our actions can be known and assuming that moral deliberation is to be done from the perspective of

57 Yoder, “Armaments and Eschatology,” 58. David O’Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse* (London: SCM, 2001), 216-17, correctly identifies the strong metaphysical strain to Yoder’s work.

58 Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 131.

59 John Howard Yoder, “The Anabaptist Shape of Liberation,” in *Why I am a Mennonite: Essays in Mennonite Identity*, ed. Harry Loewen (Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1988), 348.

60 Yoder, “Ethics and Eschatology,” 123.

61 Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 43.

62 Yoder, “Armaments and Eschatology,” 53.

those in power.⁶³ This is certainly not the shape of Jesus' life of obedience. Consequential reasoning, Yoder charges, therefore works against the grain of Scripture. To justify violence in the name of some hoped for peace "is to connect project and hope backwards."⁶⁴ Scripture rather connects project and hope in such a way that we do not justify present action on the basis of presumed consequences. Rather, Christian activity is *already* located within "the nature of that end that we confess has been initiated in the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus."⁶⁵ Once again, we see the strong realist tone to Yoder's work. It is a realism borne from attention to Scripture. People who allow their minds to be irrigated by the apocalyptic texts of Scripture are freed from having to ask such Constantinian questions as "What would happen if everybody did this?" because of their knowledge that history is firmly in the hands of the slain lamb. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (Revelation 5.12)!

One final area where we can observe the scriptural reasoning of Yoder at work is offered by his reading of Romans 13.1-7. A correct understanding of this passage is important for Yoder, who asserts, not least on the basis of his reading of apocalyptic texts, that it is not nations that direct history but the church. Accordingly, Yoder has to strip away some common readings of the text. The text is not, he says, offering a divine blessing on all states, no matter their form, be they democratic or despotic. The passage is not passing a blanket moral approval on all governments. Neither does the passage offer a "check-list" with which we can ascertain whether or not a given state is legitimate and so should receive our obedience.⁶⁶ Yoder further rebuffs that this passage is not talking prescriptively "about government of Christians and by Christians."⁶⁷ Nor is it acceptable to slip past Romans 13 by arguing that our status as citizens in modern democratic states is radically different from the powerless situation of a Roman Christian, for while democracy obviously allows for much better scrutiny of those who rule us, we "are still governed by an elite, most of whose decisions are not submitted to the people for approval."⁶⁸

A biblical realist stance appreciates that Romans 13 merely recognizes the *ordering* of ruling authorities in God's providential purposes. The text recognizes the "powers that be," despotic or benign, and is neither blessing all government nor providing criteria for knowing when to rebel. Yoder states, "all government has been permitted by God. All the powers that be are subject to the ordering of

63 Yoder, "Ethics and Eschatology," 122.

64 John Howard Yoder, "The Challenge of Peace: A Historic Peace Perspective," in *Peace in a Nuclear Age: The Bishops' Pastoral Letter in Perspective*, ed. Charles J. Reid, Jr. (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 287.

65 Ibid.

66 John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2002), 74.

67 Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 157.

68 Ibid., 158.

God, and Christians are to be subject to them all.”⁶⁹ He also notes that Romans 13 is replete with references to “order,” and says that Romans 13.1 could be translated, “Let every soul be subordinate to the ordained authorities.”⁷⁰ The imperative deployed by Paul here is important. Rather than calling for obedience, Paul calls for *subordination*, a stance that implies a recognition of the state’s authority even within a refusal to do that which it calls from us.⁷¹ The Christian is subordinate to the state, yet knows that it is the church and not the state that bears the meaning of history. Christians do, after all, understand the nature and role of the state better than the state does itself.⁷² Yoder is keen on citing Luke 22, where Jesus invites a wary skepticism in relation to rulers and calls for a servanthood modeled on his own life: “The rulers of the nations lord it over them. Those who exercise authority let themselves be called benefactors. But it shall not be so among you; you shall be servants because I am a servant” (Luke 22.25, 27; Yoder’s translation).⁷³ Christians do not need to seize the levers of history because, believing in Jesus Christ, they know that he is the key to history. Life in this setting is guided by Jesus’ patient subjection to the powers witnessed to by the Gospels and texts like Philippians 2.5-11. In accompanying Jesus into the darkness of Gethsemane, Christians know that their being in the world “must cease to be guided by the quest to have dominion over the course of events.”⁷⁴ Therefore, the correct context for reading Romans 13—knowing that it is not blessing a Christian government which will move things along in the right direction—is an apprehension of Jesus’ defeat of the powers that rule the world:

When Jesus wrestled repeatedly with the tempter, from the desert at the beginning to the garden at the end, this was not a clumsily contrived morality play meaning to teach us that kingship was no temptation; it was because God’s Man in this world was facing, and rejecting, the claim that the exercise of social responsibility through the use of self-evidently necessary means is a moral duty.⁷⁵

CONCLUSION

This article has, I hope, demonstrated something of the shape and possibilities of Yoder’s theological exegesis or what might more faithfully be called (in relation to Yoder) scriptural reasoning. Yoder reasoned through and with Scripture. For this reason I venture to suggest that there are grounds to be slightly

69 Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 208.

70 Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, 12. Emphasis in the original. This booklet was first published in 1964. By the time of the 1972 publication of *The Politics of Jesus*, this translation is not in evidence, but the same sentiment is still very much in evidence.

71 Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 213.

72 Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, 16.

73 Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 156.

74 Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 203.

75 Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 100.

less nervous about my beginning: all theological readings of Scripture, Yoder's included, are webbed within wider understandings of Christ, the church, and the nature of the Christian life. That is why I worked hard to uncover at least some of Yoder's theological convictions on these topics in a bid to show how they are porous with his reading of Scripture. Whilst the orientating remarks with which this essay opened should clearly not be wholly aligned with Yoder, his reading of Scripture does evince an adherence to my principles at their most broad: His reading of Scripture is directed towards the Christ story; the lordship of Jesus Christ is never very far away; and it is ecclesial in its orientation. Just as I want to pursue the implications of Jesus' lordship for exegesis, so too Yoder opened *The Priestly Kingdom* with the statement that "the lordship of Christ is the center which must guide critical value choices."⁷⁶

Whilst there is clearly much to be learned from Yoder, I do have some lingering reservations, not least arising out of my opening remarks. First, I have some hesitations about Yoder's apportioning to the canon a function which seems excessively communal in its scope.⁷⁷ Yoder is motivated here by an understandable reaction against fundamentalism and his insistence on the "hermeneutics of peoplehood." However, whilst there is much that is misguided in elaborate notions of inspiration and the canon (I use the word "misguided" advisedly—much of the energy and emphases allow authority to be misallocated), it is still important to keep language about the canon and the biblical authors close to talk of the action of God. It is, for example, possible to offer a theologically specific account of who Paul is without falling into the thickets of fundamentalism (as indeed Karl Barth demonstrates). My puzzlement here is that Yoder has the capacity to speak of scriptural reading in strikingly—if not unsettlingly—immanent categories that I myself would like to temper by attention to local, theological categories.⁷⁸

Second, although I have argued that for Yoder "the reality depicted in the biblical narrative is more real than the reality depicted in other narratives,"⁷⁹ I would still like to make a plea for doctrine as an aid to securing attention to the "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5.17), the specific region of Christian moral action. At times, Yoder is not entirely clear whether Jesus is being set up as exemplar or as establishing a new reality. I have no doubt of the realism running through Yoder's scriptural reasoning, and Yoder's *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* is of great significance for considering Yoder's relationship to doctrine. Nevertheless, the concerns of some of Yoder's readers on this point can be too swiftly dismissed. Yoder's emphasis on the political aspect of events like Gethsemane and the climactic death on the cross are timely. However, I wonder if Yoder's emphases on the humanity of the Gospels' Jesus are entirely in line with what is needed in today's church. Do we not *also* need a calm and insistent

76 Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 11.

77 Yoder, *For the Nations*, 72, n. 50, "The notion of 'canon' is not itself present in the texts which are in the canon. That notion is defined by the social setting in which those texts begin to function to formulate identity."

78 Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 353.

79 Carter, *Politics of the Cross*, 219.

assurance that the doctrine of the church is a faithful exploration of the one who encounters us in the Gospels? Otherwise, are we not liable to forget the necessary exegetical basis of theological and Christological thought, and so allow much Christological work to be carried out entirely divorced from scriptural reading?⁸⁰ This appeal to doctrine is not an appeal to the kind of traditionalism Yoder was right to be wary of (one model might be Karl Barth's energetic and creative reading of the obedience of Jesus and his temptations in the wilderness and Gethsemane).⁸¹ In our own time, Yoder's stimulating emphases need to be tempered by, at the very least, inquiry into chasing after and demonstrating the inter-locked relationship between Scripture and doctrine. As there is, as I have noted, a strong note of realism sounding throughout Yoder, such work would only buttress his concerns and interests.

Let me end, however, on an appropriately irenic note and suggest very briefly how Yoder's reading of Scripture's apocalyptic texts may invite the people of God to embody the virtues necessary to endure with one another, not least as fellow readers of Scripture. Yoder is right to suggest that apocalyptic people are patient people, those who are called to "the endurance and faith of the saints" (Revelation 13.10).⁸² How might the virtue of patience shape theological exegesis? A patient church knows that it can disagree over sharply divergent readings of Scripture without too hastily breaking apart or refusing to listen to one another.⁸³ Yoder complained that much Christian social ethics went about its business as if Christ had never been incarnate, had never died, risen, and ascended into the heights.⁸⁴ Theological exegesis is, at its minimum, a similar rebuff to the "methodological atheism" that characterizes too much biblical reading. In this setting the church boldly confesses the good news that scriptural reading is fixed within the gaze and time of "the Lamb that was slaughtered" (Revelation 5.12). It is with urgency that we chase after those virtues we need as readers if in order to be faithful to this slain Lamb.

Angus Paddison is a Research Fellow in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Nottingham.

80 See Angus Paddison, "Engaging Scripture: Incarnation and the Gospel of John," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007): 144-60.

81 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/2, trans. G.T. Thomson and Harold Knight (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 158-59; *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, trans. G.W. Bromiley (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 259-73.

82 Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 152.

83 There are interesting links with Stanley Hauerwas's emphasis on the virtue of patience, a topic that cannot be pursued here. See Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 230, "I am becoming increasingly convinced that patience is the crucial Christian virtue."

84 Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 162.

JESUS CHRIST AS HUMBLE LORD: KARL BARTH AND N.T. WRIGHT ON THE PHILIPPIANS “CHRIST HYMN”

J. Scott Jackson

Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus:
Who, though he was in the form of God,
Did not regard his equality with God as something to take advantage of,
But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant,
Being born in human likeness.
And, being found in human form, he humbled himself,
And became obedient to death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-8).¹

N.T. Wright famously has claimed that historical study of Christian origins should be a vital, even constitutive resource for contemporary theology; consequently, the Bishop of Durham has criticized Karl Barth and other 20th century theologians for divorcing doctrinal theology from historical scholarship.² For example, Barth eschewed the “quest” for the historical Jesus, while Wright has defended the historical quest in its own right and for its potential relevance for constructive thought.

Interpreting the theology of Paul, however, is another matter; both Barth and Wright have offered creative and provocative readings of the Apostle’s thought. Spanning the divide between the two thinkers in methodology, specialization, and situation, one finds striking parallels between their respective interpretations of Paul. In particular, both Wright and Barth read the Apostle as reinterpreting traditional ‘monotheistic’ notions of God in light of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In what follows, I will illustrate some similarities and differences between Barth’s and Wright’s views on Paul, specifically by comparing their respective exegeses of the “Christ hymn” in Phil. 2:5-11.³ I will not evaluate their exegeses *per se*, but instead will focus on how they draw strikingly similar conclusions

1 Translation by N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 69.

2 See N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God. Series title: Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 3-11; 21-27.

3 In this article, I bypass the question whether Phil. 2:5-11 is an original composition of Paul or his appropriation of a preexistent hymn to support his argument in the epistle. Settling this question is not vital for either Wright’s or Barth’s interpretation of its theological meaning in context. See, for instance, Wright’s brief comments on this matter in *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 97-98.

about the character of Jesus' divinity and his salvific vocation. I will focus primarily on the first half of the Christ hymn (vv. 5-8), which depicts Jesus as the one who was and is eternally equal with God the Father but, in a radical movement of condescension and humility, assumes the form (*morphē*) of the fallen human servant (*doulos*) and carries out his vocation to his obedient suffering of death on the cross. I will only secondarily refer to the second movement of the Christ hymn (vv. 9-11) in which the crucified and risen Servant is exalted as the Lord (*kyrios*) over the cosmic powers. Wright, as I will show, preserves key Christological and soteriological motifs from Barth's exposition while proposing a helpful correction of the latter's interpretation of the Philippians passage. Both interpreters find in Paul's appropriation (or composition) of the Christ hymn the following theological claims: 1) The atonement between God and humanity occurs when, in the person of Jesus, God takes on human flesh in a free self-emptying (*kenosis*); 2) this descent of the Son into human flesh reaches a climax in Jesus' obedience in facing death on the cross; 3) this occurs without detriment to Christ's essential deity (as this is vindicated in his exaltation to the right hand of God).

I. BARTH: THE SERVANT-LORD IN THE FAR COUNTRY

Without a doubt, Phil. 2:5-11 is one of the most crucial New Testament passages that informs Barth's Christology and doctrine of reconciliation.⁴ This hymn bears such freight for Barth because it serves as "a little compendium of Pauline testimony."⁵ He repeatedly returns to exegesis of this passage. Here, I will focus especially on the treatment of the passage by the "early" Barth in his Philippians commentary and a parallel example from the "later Barth" in a key excursus in *Church Dogmatics* IV/1.

Philippians (1926-27). Barth's brilliant commentary on the epistle, based upon lectures at the University of Münster in Westphalia, situates Phil. 2:1-11 as a discrete and compressed theological confession that grounds the overarching theme of communal unity within the letter. At issue is the necessity of humility and service to each other in conformity with the "mind of Christ." Just as Jesus Christ exhibited humble compassion, so too are the Philippians to regard the needs of others above their own.⁶ The common life of Christians is summed up by the life of Christ, the head of the church. Still, the Christ hymn draws the reader (or hearer) briefly away from the squabbles of the Philippian congregation into theology proper: a retelling of the dynamic movement of condescension and exaltation realized ad extra in the economy of salvation.

As for Phil. 2:1-11, Barth takes at face value that the Apostle and his readers/hearers assume the full divinity of Jesus: the Lord confessed by all tongues

4 See Douglas Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2003), 54-55. Harink suggests that the three-part doctrine of reconciliation in *Church Dogmatics* IV/1-3 follows the narrative logic compressed in Phil. 2:6-11: the "obedience of the Son of God" (part 1), "the exaltation of the Son of Man" (part 2), and "the glory of the Mediator" (part 3).

5 See Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, trans. James W. Leitch (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 49.

6 *Ibid.*, 49-60.

is equal in dignity to God the Father.⁷ Thus, Paul has no need to argue that Jesus and the Father are one in being and dignity. Hence, "This equality of Christ with God is, so to speak, the fixed ultimate background from which his road sets out and to which it returns."⁸ Paul and the Philippians, according to Barth, find the divinity of Christ "intelligible in itself."⁹ The point of the passage consists not in the equality of the Savior with the Father per se but rather in the concrete meaning of his divine nature in the economy of salvation.

Barth introduces his own take on the exegetical enigma in v. 6 that continues to vex exegetes: the question of how to interpret the claim that Jesus did not regard being equal with God as "spoil" (*harpagmos*).¹⁰ For Barth, the emphasis of this term resides not in Jesus' ontological divine status, but rather in the attitude the Savior exhibits toward this status. In contrast to the prideful Christians at Philippi, Jesus Christ does not assert his rights by clinging greedily to the divine dignity and prerogatives that are his by right. Unlike a robber clutching his spoil, he willingly divests himself of the honor that redounds to his majestic form as the Son of God. In the blessedness of his divinity, Jesus can take on the abased form of the servant that would seem to negate this divine form. Thus, Barth draws a distinction between the "being" of Christ as God's equal and the "form" that being takes—namely, the form of the human being in distinction from the eternal and transcendent form of the Son of God. Barth writes,

Now, says Paul, Christ does not regard his equality with God in such a way as to cling to the form of God, or to be bound to it. He is so much God's equal that he does not by any means have to make of his equality with God a thing to be asserted tooth and nail—not because he could also give it up, but because his possession of it (in contrast to the best that they can possess) is beyond dispute.¹¹

In other words, Christ does not cease to be God, but in his incarnate form wears his deity lightly.

Moreover, especially in this early exposition of the Christ hymn, epistemological concerns are paramount: Barth's conception of revelation emphasizes the hiddenness of God in Christ. The self-emptying that Jesus undertakes is a masking of his divine glory under the scandalous form of the obedient servant, a lowly human being. Barth notes, "From now on he is equal with God in the obscurity of the form of a servant. He is in humility the highest."¹² This ability to conceal his divine glory under the veil of creaturely existence manifests the depths of his sovereign freedom. In the person of the Son, God is free to appear in and as the

7 Ibid., 60-61.

8 Ibid., 61.

9 Ibid.

10 See Wright, *Climax*, 62. The term *harpagmos* appears only this once in the New Testament, never in the Septuagint, and only a few times in non-biblical Greek writers (particularly, patristic sources interpreting this passage).

11 Barth, *Philippians*, 62.

12 - Ibid.

non-divine other. That is, “Christ, being equal with God, has no need to assert himself in that or cling to it, but can renounce the outward appearance and credit that correspond to such being, without surrendering the being itself.”¹³

For Barth, the *kenosis* of the Son is not simply noetic but is based upon the living relationship between the Father and the Son within the Triune life. For the incarnation to be anything other than a mirage, the appearance of God in the flesh must be grounded within the sovereignty and freedom of the Son, who is not compelled by fate but freely assumes the form of the servant. Barth understands the meaning of this movement and condescension primarily in terms of Christ’s foregoing the direct manifestation of his divine glory. Thus, Christ “puts himself in a position where only he himself knows himself in the way that the Father knows him.”¹⁴ As Barth expresses this concept later, in revelation God gives Godself to be known in a “second objectivity” that depends upon the “primary objectivity” of the inner-Trinitarian knowing.¹⁵

Barth’s interpretation of v. 6 distinguishes Christ’s being as equal to God (*to einai isa theoi*)—the ontic dimension of Christ’s divinity presupposed by Paul—from the chiefly noetic dimension of his being perceived in the form of God (*en morphē tou theou*). “That is how he takes on the ‘form of a servant,’ the appearance and the credit (or rather lack of credit) of a being that is not God, that is not the Lord.”¹⁶ Barth paraphrases Calvin: “The *humilitatis carnis* (humility of the flesh) covers the *divina majestas* (divine majesty) like a curtain.”¹⁷

Barth does not reduce the incarnation and death of Jesus to a mere appearance that masks more than it reveals about the true nature of God. Nonetheless, it does seem that Barth’s early preoccupation with grounding revelation in the freedom of God results in a more narrowly epistemological reading of this passage. He writes, “What we see is a man, the form of one exposed to all the dubiousness, ambiguity, and darkness of an individual human existence, the form not of a lord but of a servant.”¹⁸ The finite and sin-darkened human mind cannot penetrate the scandal of this divine incognito. Indeed, one might extrapolate from Barth’s argument that such an attempt to grasp the vision of God on a basis other than God’s self-revelation as the humble servant in Christ exhibits just the pride that Paul excoriates in the Philippian congregation.

As Barth shows, the humiliation of Christ in the incarnation is carried through to its logical and bitter end in his death on the cross.¹⁹ The one who abased himself infinitely has chosen not the heights of worldly honor, as might seem befitting for deity incarnate, but the form of the truly wretched slave who dies a criminal’s death. In the narrative flow of this passage, the moments of in-

13 Ibid., 62-63.

14 Ibid., 63.

15 See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, trans. T.H.L. Parker, W.B. Johnson, Harold Knight, and J.L.M. Haire (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 16-17.

16 Barth, *Philippians*, 63.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., 64.

19 Ibid., 64-65.

carnation, suffering, and crucifixion form a seamless whole. Jesus' death is not a discrete moment distinct from the incarnation, but rather is its culmination. According to Barth, Paul emphasizes Jesus' attitude of humble obedience, while the question of whom Jesus is obeying falls oddly into the background. The emphasis is instead upon the freedom of the incarnate one to bear this scandalous destiny as the deepest expression of who he is as God's equal. Barth observes, "The death on the cross is indeed only the unfolding of the incarnation. There, on Golgotha, the meaning of the incarnation, the meaning of Bethlehem, breaks through and comes into view."²⁰

Jesus Christ's freely accepted humiliation is the basis of his subsequent vindication in resurrection and exaltation as the *kyrios* of the universe, to whom the cosmic, terrestrial, and subterranean powers must give homage (2:9-11).²¹ Barth emphasizes the connective "therefore" (*dio*) in v. 9. The exaltation of the crucified servant is not merely a reversal of a human injustice; rather, it is the Father's profound verdict on the true character of Jesus Christ as fully divine and, thus, fully self-giving.

The Doctrine of Reconciliation, part 1 (1953). When we turn to Barth's expositions of the Philippians passage at the heart of par. 59.1 in *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, we find he has preserved the themes from the earlier commentary but reworked them within his unfolding doctrinal argument.²² In this section, which Barth titles "The Obedience of the Son: The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country," the theme is the radical condescension of the Son in the incarnation, which turns upside down conventional expectations about the true character of deity. Phil. 2:5-11 forms a linchpin for Barth's argument, and the hymn occurs at key points in the explication of Christ's divinity, particularly highlighting the character of divinity as humble compassion.

Central for Barth to the Christology of the hymn are the phrases that Christ "emptied" (*ekenōsen*) and "humbled" (*etapeinōsen*) himself (vv. 7 and 8, respectively).²³ Both terms indicate the humility of the Son who, without ceasing to exist "in the form of God," assumed the form of a humble servant—a condescension into the depths of the human situation which culminates in Christ's willing suffering and death.

The Christ hymn, read in conjunction with other New Testament passages, serves both constructive and polemical purposes for Barth.²⁴ Positively, Barth presupposes a continuity in the Son's status and dignity from the beginning to the end of the passage. Thus, Christ's exaltation at the end is consonant with his being in the form of God at the beginning of the narrative. Barth seeks to show that Christ

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 66-68.

22 See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, trans. G.W. Bromily (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 164-65; 180-83; 188-92. In these excursions, Barth reads the Christ hymn not in isolation but in harmony with other New Testament (especially Pauline) passages.

23 Ibid., 164-65.

24 These themes come to fruition in the key excursus, *ibid.*, 180-83.

is depicted as fully divine both in his eternal preexistence and within his incarnate state. Barth uses the passage as a hedge against notions of a divine figure that, as a projection of human rulers, is too proud and aloof to be self-involved with the desperate situation of a fallen humanity. Moreover, Barth also uses this exegesis to refute a kind of kenoticism that so enmeshes the Son in finitude and death that Jesus forfeits the divine essence and dignity he shares with the Father and Holy Spirit from all eternity. This passage, for Barth, reveals an utterly free Lord whose sovereignty is perfectly manifest in total self-commitment, even to the point of suffering a wretched death.²⁵ For Barth, the incarnation is the utterly free and sovereign act of the one who is by nature the eternal Logos and who, as the Word made flesh, has enacted his eternal decision to be for us.

According to Barth, Christ's being is not diminished, although he conceals his deity. Phil. 2:5-11 reinforces this basic point:

The Christian theological tradition has always been in agreement that the statement "the Word was made flesh" is not to be thought of as describing an event which overtook Him, and therefore overtook God Himself, but rather a free divine activity, a sovereign act of divine Lordship, an act of mercy which was necessary only by virtue of the will of God Himself.²⁶

Barth echoes the two natures/one person formula of Chalcedon: even after the incarnation, the Son retains the transcendent divine nature uncorrupted. Hence, he contends that "God is always God even in His humiliation. The divine being does not suffer any change, any diminution, any transformation into something else, any admixture with something else, let alone any cessation."²⁷ This is because, as Barth notes later, the blessedness of the divine unity will not admit any antinomy or disruption within the Triune divine life nor in the economy of salvation.²⁸

The key insight from the Christ hymn for Barth's view of the incarnation pivots on his reading of the "form" the Son bears by nature and right and its relationship to a kenotic movement into the life-form of the fallen creature. In a sense, as Barth clarifies here beyond his exposition in the commentary, Jesus Christ does not so much relinquish the form of the eternal *logos* as add to that form the additional one of the servant. Therein lies the sovereign freedom of Jesus' divinity: he

25 In my dissertation, I argue that Barth's treatment of Christ's divinity in the doctrine of reconciliation interweaves the twin motifs of divine freedom and love, as a re-articulation and deepening of the doctrine of God in covenantal terms. See Scott Jackson, *Jesus Christ as the God who Loves in Freedom: Election, Covenant and the Trinity in the Thought of Karl Barth* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2006), chapter 5.

26 Barth, CD IV/1, 179.

27 Ibid. For a reading of Barth's Christology within the classic two-natures framework, see George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Christology: Its basic Chalcedonian character," in John Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), 127-42.

28 Barth, CD IV/1, 186-88.

can simultaneously be fully divine and fully human without contradiction, though his bearing of the human form entails a broadening and redefinition of conceptions of deity that Paul's audience (and we) might derive on a basis independent of the gospel. Thus, for Barth, the *kenosis* of v. 6 "consists in a renunciation of His being in the form of God alone."²⁹

Barth's reading of v. 6 reiterates his claims in the Philippians commentary. Christ did not consider his divine form as something to be hoarded greedily as a robber's booty, as though being in the form of God in blessedness was his "one and only and exclusive possibility."³⁰ The emphasis is upon the majestic freedom of the Son in the incarnation: "It was not to Him an inalienable necessity to exist only in the form of God, only to be God, and therefore only to be different from the creature, from man, as the reality which is distinct from God, only to be the eternal Word and not flesh."³¹ The movement of the Son into the far country of human sin, suffering, and death does entail true humility. In particular, this is expressed in the condescension of the Lord to live as the suffering servant with all the bitter consequences that entails. Here, Barth interprets this primarily as the Son's assuming the alien form of the servant. The free willingness to live as the servant plays out in Jesus' obedient acceptance of his vocation.

Barth affirms the *extra Calvinisticum* doctrine, which held (against some early Lutheran theologians) that, even during Jesus' earthly life, the eternal and transcendent *logos* never ceased to rule creation.³² Barth stresses that, as Jesus Christ, God gave Godself utterly to the cause of humanity without relinquishing the divine freedom and power that made Christ strong to save. The Son can be ubiquitous and concretely present as Jesus of Nazareth simultaneously. "He is the Lord and Creator who because He becomes a creature and exists in that *forma servi* does not cease to be the Lord and Creator and therefore to exist in the *forma Dei*."³³

More pointedly, Barth separates himself from the 19th century kenotic theologians who, prompted by a growing sensitivity to Jesus' human historicity, promoted a metaphysical account of the incarnation as an actual renunciation by the Son (if only temporarily) of his full divine attributes and capacities.³⁴ Thus, while Barth has preserved his earlier emphasis on the hiddenness of the Son's deity in the incarnation and crucifixion, in this later discussion, the concern has broadened more explicitly into a more ontological meditation upon what characterizes the divine nature as such. What God's *kenosis* in Jesus Christ entails, for Barth, is not a divestment of omnipotence, omnipresence, eternity, etc., but rather a redefinition of deity in terms of humble obedience and self-giving love. This is a major burden not only of Barth's Philippians 2 excurses but of paragraph 59 as a whole.

29 ^m Ibid., 180.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Barth, CD IV/1, 180-81; see also CD II/1, 515-18.

33 Barth, CD IV/1, 181.

34 ^c Ibid., 181-83.

Because it is embedded within this broader polemical and doctrinal context, though, Barth's understanding of what *kenosis* could mean, positively and concretely, is somewhat obscured. Might there be a way to preserve the insights of Barth's reading while attaining this further clarity?

II. WRIGHT: DIVINE KYRIOS AS HUMBLE SERVANT

When one turns to N.T. Wright's work on the theology of Paul, one enters a different landscape from Barth's densely textured dogmatics. Nonetheless, striking parallels appear between the insights of the New Testament scholar and the Reformed theologian.³⁵ Though developed concisely, some of Wright's comments in *What Saint Paul Really Said* are particularly relevant.³⁶ In a sense congruent with Barth's project, Wright discerns in the Apostle a high Christology that prompts a radical revision of first-century Jewish covenantal monotheism.

In chapter 4 especially, Wright makes a striking and novel exegetical case that Paul affirmed the divinity of Jesus, and this brief exposition sets the critical backdrop for a more focused reading of the Christ hymn. Wright argues that the encounter with the risen Jesus entailed, for Paul, a radical reinterpretation of traditional Jewish monotheism. Now the being of the one God of the covenant had to be redefined to include the crucified and risen Messiah and the Holy Spirit.³⁷ Thus, centuries before Nicea and Chalcedon, the Apostle began a Trinitarian reconfiguration of YHWH-centered theology. As Wright puts it, "If the early fathers hadn't existed it would be necessary to invent them."³⁸ In his view, Paul's bold move is a logical, if radical, articulation of a dynamic tension inherent within Second Temple Judaism. On the one hand, Judaism as a whole (amid its diversity) was strictly iconoclastic in affirming Israel's God, YHWH, as the only Lord of the cosmos. Concomitant with this was an adamant rejection of idolatry among the Greco-Roman religions. Still, this strict monotheism embraced complex distinctions among how Jewish thought envisioned the modes of divine presence in terms of Torah, Spirit, Wisdom, Shekinah, and Word. Such conceptions served to link the transcendent Creator in intimate relationship with creation. In light of the advent of Jesus the Messiah, Paul developed these conceptions in a more radical direction.

Herein lies the novelty of Paul's vision, according to Wright: "at the very moment when he is giving Jesus the highest titles and honors, he is also emphasizing that he, Paul, is a good Jewish-style monotheist."³⁹ Paul is juxtaposing, indeed harmonizing, classic motifs from Jewish tradition with a "high" Christology that stresses the personal unity and equality of Jesus with Father. In addition to Philippians 2, Wright draws upon two other Pauline passages: First, 1 Cor. 8:6

35 Though Wright does, as I will show, comment on Barth's exegesis in a limited way, I am not interested here in tracing any hypothesis about a genetic influence of Barth's writings on Wright's past and ongoing work.

36 See Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 69.

37 Ibid., 63-65.

38 Ibid., 66.

39 Ibid., 65.

brings God the Father (who creates all things) and the Lord Jesus (through whom all things are created) into the closest proximity of dignity and office. Second, in Col. 1:15-20, the Apostle reworks the psalmists' tradition of naming YHWH as Creator to situate the risen Jesus at the center of this cosmic drama.⁴⁰

Imbedded in this discussion is Wright's brief exposition of Phil. 2:5-11.⁴¹ When Paul caps off this hymn with the claim that "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow...and every tongue confess 'Jesus Christ is Lord!' to the glory of God the Father" (vv. 10-11), he echoes Isaiah 45:23, where YHWH is the one recipient of every creature's praise.⁴² God in the Hebrew Scriptures refuses to share the divine glory with another. But it is precisely this glorifying of Jesus that is set up in the first stanzas of the hymn. Wright adduces three points:

- (1) Jesus was truly in the form of God, that is, he was equal with God. But (2) he did not regard divine equality as something to exploit.... Instead, Paul says, (3) he offered the true interpretation of what it meant to be equal with God: he became human, and died under the weight of the sin of the world, obedient to the divine saving plan.⁴³

These claims mesh well with Barth's claims that God's condescension in Christ entails a reconception of the true nature of deity. This means not paring down divine transcendence within a restrictive kenotic framework, but rather broadening the notion of the divine sovereignty to encompass the deep humiliation of self-giving love. Jesus Christ enacts the true character of God dramatically on the cross, where YHWH of Israel accomplishes what no pagan deities, as idolatrous projections of human arrogance, could do—utter self-abasement for the salvation of the creature.⁴⁴ Barth and Wright, I think, would agree: herein lies the mystery of God's being as sheer agape. Herein also resides the miracle of atonement, that the eternal Lord would stoop to share the creature's fate at the deepest possible level of destitution. The "climax" of the covenant, in a sense, occurs at Golgotha, as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob comes to us as self-giving love. Our salvation is won in a battle against evil that is engaged only in and through an ignominious

40 • Ibid., 69-70. Wright does not see the controversy over whether Paul or a disciple of his wrote Colossians as particularly relevant to his overall argument, though Wright favors Pauline authorship for the epistle. See Wright, *Climax*, 99.

41 In *What Saint Paul Really Said*, Wright leaves open the question whether this passage was an original composition of the Apostle or drawn from an early liturgical hymn to Christ. His interest, like Barth's, lies in the way the poem functions within the epistle and Paul's corpus as a whole. See Wright, *Climax*, 97-98.

42 Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 67.

43 Ibid., 68.

44 Ibid. Chief among the pagan deities of Paul's day would be the increasingly deified Caesar; Philippi was a major center for the imperial cult. See Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 88. See also N.T. Wright, "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire," in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl*, ed. Richard Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 160-83.

death, a sheer reversal of typical values.⁴⁵

Wright is making the characteristically Barthian point that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not metaphysical speculation but the witness to God's saving action within Israel's history and for the sake of the whole world. The essence of Paul's gospel in Philippians and throughout the epistles is that "the one true God consists, through and through, in self-giving love."⁴⁶ Jesus' humble submission to death on the cross is utterly consistent with the essential being of God. No pagan deity or mortal ruler could accomplish this. Thus, for Paul, the kenotic sacrifice of Jesus forces a reinterpretation of the being of God that bursts through conventional Jewish expectations—precisely, as Wright emphasizes, from within those expectations.

Furthermore, Wright offers a salutary corrective of Barth by offering a more straightforward reading of what Paul means by claiming Jesus Christ "did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited" (Phil. 2:6, NRSV). Wright's correction also helps to clarify the nature of Christ's *kenosis* and the relationship between his being in the "form of God" and in the "form of a slave." These insights come from an earlier, more technical essay reprinted in *The Climax of the Covenant*.⁴⁷ Here I can only draw out a couple relevant points from this brilliant essay. According to Wright, a key theme of Phil. 2:5-11 (read in tandem with Rom. 5:12-21) is Christ's willing obedience to endure humiliation and death. Wright traces connections between the Christ hymn and pivotal figures of the Hebrew Scriptures: Adam as the archetypical human; Israel as vicarious humanity; the enigmatic Suffering Servant figure (Isaiah 40-55); and the apocalyptic Son of Man (Daniel 7). Philippians 2, in essence, recapitulates these layers of typology, and we find "the theme of a humiliated and then exalted figure who is given great authority and power alongside the one God of Jewish monotheism."⁴⁸ Christ the *Kyrios* became human to carry out the mandate of Israel to reverse the sin of Adam.

Wright offers a critique of ten distinct interpretations of the puzzling term *harpagmos* in v. 6; Barth's view is analyzed in one brief but incisive page.⁴⁹ Barth, as I have discussed, understands the *harpagmos* that Christ eschews as something seized, like a robber's spoil. As Wright reads Barth, "Christ's existence only in the form of God was 'given up' in favor of the new state of being both in the form of God and in the form of a servant."⁵⁰ Wright affirms Barth's "healthy" insistence on the abiding divinity of Jesus Christ throughout the incarnation and crucifixion. Nonetheless, Wright gently criticizes Barth for obscuring the more straightforward meaning of Christ's *kenosis* within a brilliant, albeit overly subtle theological interpretation: Christ does not so much give anything up as take on something

45 Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 46-49.

46 Ibid., 69.

47 Wright, *Climax*, chapter 4.

48 Ibid., 58.

49 Ibid., 74.

50 Ibid.

new, namely, the form of fallen humanity.

By contrast, Wright (following Hoover and Moule) interprets *harpagmos* thusly: “the action or attitude envisioned is not the grasping of, or clinging on to, equality with God, but the attitude—of advantage-taking, of ‘getting,’ of behaving like an oriental despot—based on that equality.”⁵¹ In other words, Jesus need not cling to equality with the Father, for he possesses this state by nature. The issue is that he enacts and interprets that equality in terms of servant humility. Wright rewords Phil. 2:6 as Christ “did not regard his equality with God as something to be used for his own advantage.”⁵² Or again, “Christ did not regard his equality with God as something to be exploited for his own gain.”⁵³ This point is consistent with Barth’s interpretation of Jesus Christ (in Phil. 2:5-11) as the humble Lord who is exalted precisely for his humble obedience.

According to Wright, Jesus retains his character as the Father’s equal throughout the narrative of Phil. 2:5-11; yet for the sake of his vocation, Jesus eschews any advantages or privileges that were his by right. “The pre-existent son regarded equality with God not as excusing him from the task of (redemptive) suffering and death, but actually as uniquely qualifying him for that vocation.”⁵⁴

Wright sums up the implications of his exegesis in a way that, certainly, is consonant with Barth’s Christological and cross-centered vision of God as the “One who Loves in Freedom” (in *CD II/1* and, indeed, throughout the *Dogmatics*):

The real theological emphasis of the hymn, therefore, is not simply a new view of Jesus. It is a new understanding of God. Against the age-old attempts of human beings to make God in their own (arrogant, self-glorifying) image, Calvary reveals the truth about what it means to be God. Underneath this is the conclusion, all-important in present christological debate: incarnation and even crucifixion are to be seen as *appropriate* vehicles for the dynamic self-revelation of God.⁵⁵

III. CONCLUSIONS

Karl Barth and N.T. Wright both find the Christ hymn of Phil. 2:5-11 crucial for their respective interpretations of Paul’s theology and, by implication, for their own projects as well. Each thinker finds in this passage a clear affirmation of Jesus Christ’s essential divinity. Both thinkers understand the character of the God revealed in Christ to be self-giving *agape* without remainder. In the profoundest humility, which reverses the arrogant pretensions of some Philippian Christians and of earthly powers as a whole, Christ empties himself. At least three possible meanings of this kenosis emerge: Christ conceals his divine majesty under the form of the humble and obedient servant (especially in the early writings

51 Ibid., 78-79. Emphasis in original.

52 Ibid., 79. Emphasis in original.

53 Ibid., 80.

54 Ibid., 84.

55 Ibid. Emphasis in original.

of Barth); Christ expands the definition of what it means to be in the form of God in his simultaneous embrace of the form of the suffering servant (especially in the later writings of Barth); or Christ retains his full, essential divinity while foregoing any divine advantages or privileges for the sake of his salvific vocation. These claims, in the end, are complementary.

In addition to these material parallels, the comparison of Wright and Barth invites a more thorough comparison of the two thinkers, which could have fruitful implications for constructive theology in terms of the doctrine of God, Christology, and soteriology. Wright's project is still a work in progress, and we can expect future writings on Paul to illuminate further comparison with Barth. More importantly, a thorough comparison of these two seminal thinkers could help honor the desire of both to achieve a more comprehensive integration of sound biblical exegesis with constructive Christian thought.

J. Scott Jackson, who holds a Ph.D. in theology from the University of Chicago Divinity School, helps coordinate the Jakob's Well Ecumenical Christian Community in Western Massachusetts.

SEEKING 'THE INEXPRESSIBLE TEXTURE OF THY WORD' A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO BREVARD CHILDS' CANONICAL APPROACH TO THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS

Dennis T. Olson

The year 2007 marked the passing of one of North America's finest Old Testament scholars, Brevard Childs of Yale University. Childs was a remarkably erudite and prolific scholar who combined his great learning with a grace, kindness, and humility born of a deep and abiding faith in God. As his student, I deeply appreciated Childs' broad knowledge of Bible and theology, his masterful teaching, his analytical skill, his theological passion, and his generous spirit. At a time when scholars debated whether the disciplines of Bible and theology could have anything to say or do with one another, the work of Brevard Childs and his so-called "canonical approach" to Scripture helped to open up a space in biblical studies in North America for the importance of the theological study of the Bible. Childs' work stimulated new scholarly ventures in bringing together the Bible, theology, and the history of biblical interpretation with historical-critical and literary study of Scripture in ways that continue to blossom and bear fruit.

Students have often asked me for a concise and practical guide to Childs' canonical approach to theological exegesis, and I have been hard pressed to point to one source for such a guide. Childs' approach tends to be more of an overall set of complex orientations than a step-by-step method. However, I will attempt here to offer some guidance into Childs' conception of the process of theological exegesis envisioned by his program. I will begin by outlining the major intersection points in the study of the Bible that were particularly important for Childs' work. I will then offer a brief orientation to his "canonical" approach as a practice of theological exegesis and make explicit two key assumptions that inform Childs' method. In light of those assumptions, I will highlight a brief but helpful section of Childs' book, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament*, and use it as the basis for laying out more clearly some of the practical steps involved in what, for Childs, was the complex but central task of the theological exegesis of Scripture.

FOUR INTERSECTION POINTS IN CHILDS' WORK

After I had been accepted into the Ph.D. program in Old Testament at Yale University in 1980 but before I had arrived on Yale's campus, I wrote a letter to Professor Childs. I asked for his suggestions about what I might read in the coming months in preparation for coming to Yale to study. He wrote back a gracious letter and suggested that I carefully work through Heinrich Bornkamm's 1948 monograph, *Luther und das Alte Testament* in its original German (although an

English translation was readily available).¹ As I would learn, that single suggestion prefigured a number of Childs' core concerns and convictions about theological exegesis and the interpretation of biblical texts.

First of all, Childs believed that students of Christian Scripture ought to stand within and know thoroughly their own deep and rich theological traditions. The story is told of one struggling first-year M.Div. student in Childs' class whose first attempt at biblical exegesis had apparently been less than fully adequate. The student asked Childs for his suggestion on how to write a deeper and more profound biblical exegesis paper. Childs' reply: "If you want to write a deeper exegesis paper, become a deeper person!" For Childs, part of becoming a better exegete was growing more conversant with Scripture, more intimately acquainted with one's own theological tradition as well as others', more acquainted with the best intellectual resources of literature, philosophy, history and social sciences, and more developed in one's spiritual life through faith in God and active love of neighbor. I was a Lutheran, so one way I could keep growing was to deepen my knowledge of how Luther interpreted the Bible theologically for his own time and context and what that meant for my own faith and life. Although himself a Presbyterian, Childs intentionally welcomed diverse Protestant, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Jewish students as his doctoral students. He appreciated the unique strengths of these diverse traditions and enjoyed the ecumenical conversations and debates in biblical seminars that he led. He encouraged us to claim and appreciate the treasures of the deep historical and theological traditions in which we stood.

At the same time, Childs also believed that exegesis ought to be informed by listening to voices other than one's own native tradition. Childs earned his basic theological education with his Bachelor of Divinity at Princeton Theological Seminary in the U.S., but he crossed the ocean and ultimately did his doctoral work at the University of Basel in Switzerland. Along the way, he also studied in seminars with a number of the best European biblical and theological scholars of the twentieth century (Gerhard von Rad, Walter Zimmerli, Oscar Cullmann, Heinrich Bornkamm, Karl Barth). At Yale, he continued to "cross oceans" as he sought out robust dialogue and scholarly friendship with Jewish professors of midrash (e.g., Judah Goldin and James Kugel), professors of New Testament (e.g., Nils Dahl and Leander Keck), and professors of theology (e.g., Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, and David Kelsey), among others.

Childs' suggestion to me to work on improving my German was a kind of metaphor for the need continually to work at expanding my horizons by learning the "foreign languages" of other scholars, other perspectives, other traditions, and other scholarly disciplines as they impacted the theological interpretation of the Old Testament. Such openness to the other maintained a constant growing edge and basis for critical dialogue and assessment of one's self and one's own tradition. Appreciation for one's own tradition needed to be combined with critical

1 Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther und das Alte Testament* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1948); translated into English as *Luther and the Old Testament*, trans. Eric and Ruth Gritsch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1969).

engagement and the expansion of horizons.

As the Augustinian monk/Reformer Martin Luther had stood at the intersection of a host of forces, movements, and debates about the Bible in the context of late medieval Catholicism, the Renaissance and the Reformation, so too Childs worked throughout his career at four important and much-disputed crossroads in the modern study of the Old Testament. One intersection point was the way in which a rigorous and descriptive historical-critical study of the Bible as an ancient text ought to intersect with normative theological and ethical interpretation of the Bible for the life of faith communities today. A second intersecting point in which Childs was deeply invested involved appreciation for the fact that the Old Testament functioned first of all as authoritative Scripture for a living Jewish faith community alongside its function as Scripture for the Christian community of faith. A third intersection point for Childs was the nexus between the distinctive witness of the Old Testament in its original context and the witness of the New Testament in its context. Finally, Childs sought to explore how the theological interpretation of Scripture (biblical theology) should be related to the task of constructing Christian dogmatic theology. These four intersection points—ancient text/modern faith, Jews/Christians, Old Testament/New Testament, and biblical theology/dogmatic theology—formed the nodal points around which Childs worked and struggled for much of his career.

CHILDS' CANONICAL APPROACH TO THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS— TWO KEY ASSUMPTIONS

Childs' use of the term "canonical" to describe his project has given rise to some misunderstandings. For Childs, the term "canonical" as applied to biblical interpretation is not primarily about the relative stability or diversity of ancient lists of authoritative books (i.e., which books were or were not considered canonical and for what ancient communities). Rather, his method is an interpretive stance or orientation that seeks to interpret the Bible as sacred Scripture within communities of faith, guided by the Holy Spirit, who continues to speak new words from God through Scripture in each new generation. Childs' canonical approach is not just another method or criticism but more a posture that is open to genuine insights from the whole array of critical and scholarly methods, whether historical, literary, philosophical, or social-scientific. In doing so, the canonical approach is particularly attentive to the ways in which specific biblical texts were selected, ordered, and shaped in the process of transmission in ancient communities *so that* these ancient texts could address later generations who had not shared in the original events or contexts in which the texts were first uttered, written, and shaped. This conviction that biblical texts, through a great variety of distinctive strategies, have been shaped at various stages so as to be accessible and appropriated by succeeding generations is a core assumption of Childs' canonical approach. The canonical reader of Scripture is looking for insights into how the writers and editors of biblical texts, at definitive stages in their formation, have carefully constructed them in content and framework so as to enable the biblical text to address future generations of readers in a normative way as a divine word addressed to them.

Sometimes this definitive shaping of texts that enables appropriation of biblical texts by future readers and hearers occurs at an early stage of the text's formation. So, for example, many individual psalms in the book of Psalms were so generic and widely applicable to a variety of human situations at a very early stage of their composition that they could be taken up without much editing and prayed by future generations as their own words addressed to God.² Most of the time, however, this definitive theological shaping of biblical texts, which allowed them to speak to future generations, occurred at the later stages of the texts' formation and editing, particularly in the exilic and post-exilic periods of the Old Testament. Thus, the oracles of the prophet Amos, originally addressed to the northern kingdom of Israel in the decade of 760-750 BCE, were collected and shaped into a prophetic book that retained its original historical setting under King Jeroboam and the specific religious and socio-political conditions of injustice of his time (see the editorial superscription of Amos 1:1). At the same time, however, editors shaped the prophetic oracles so that the oracles originally addressed to northern "Israel" (Amos 3:12) could also address the broader "Israel" as the whole people of God and all those who claimed the sacred tradition of the exodus as their own (Amos 2:10, 9:7). Moreover, the eschatological judgment and promise of God in the final chapter of Amos 9 sets the particular episode of one historical prophet (Amos) within the larger pattern of God's righteous judgment and ultimate deliverance "in the latter days," lifting what was once a time-bound witness into a more distant future framed by the larger purposes of God.³

A second key assumption of Childs' canonical approach is the affirmation of the reality of an external, out-there-in-the-world, living God. Ultimately, it is God who works through the frail vessels of human communities of faith and of Scripture to speak God's redeeming word to the world through the ministry of the church. Interpreting the Bible is not just about entering into another fictive or imaginative literary world, nor is it only about an objective reconstruction of ancient history. Interpreting the Bible involves a deep and careful engagement with the particular details, texture, and plain sense of a specific biblical text and its role within the larger witness of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments. This careful engagement is done in prayerful expectation that the God of Jesus Christ will speak a true divine word with power to judge, redeem, and save through the Holy Spirit, who works through the worship and service of a sinful but redeemed human community. As the apostle Paul describes it, the gospel of Jesus Christ "is the power of God for salvation to everyone, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

The first of the Ten Commandments undergirds much of Childs' program:

2 For his discussion of the canonical shaping of the book of Psalms, see Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979), 505-25.

3 On the book of Amos, see Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 395-410. For a recent study of the Book of the Twelve Prophets from a canonical perspective, see Christopher Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics, Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

“you shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3) and its positive flip side, “you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5; see also Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27). All else, including human obedience, faithful exegesis, and love of neighbor, flows out of this God-centered orientation. “Canonical” interpretation, then, is less concerned with debates about the biblical canon as an ancient list of core books (with some variety around the edges) and more concerned with interpreting Scripture (however a tradition defines its scriptural canon) as a witness to God and God’s strange and alien work in the world.

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE CANONICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

How then might Childs guide us in his canonical or theological interpretation of Scripture? One could get an answer to that question in several ways. You could read his 555-page commentary on the whole book of Isaiah, published in 2001, and there you could look over the shoulder of a master exegete at work.⁴ You could plow through his 688-page *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, which summarizes historical-critical issues for every book of the Old Testament (up to 1979).⁵ In that hefty volume, you would learn about Childs’ account of the many and varied ways in which the individual biblical books have been shaped theologically to address successive generations of readers and hearers. You could work through his 332-page overview of the history of Christian interpretation of Isaiah from the ancient to modern periods in *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* and the hermeneutical conclusions that he draws for how the Bible should be interpreted today.⁶ You might turn to the two samples of doing “exegesis in the context of biblical theology” in his treatments of the near-sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 and the parable of the wicked tenants in Matthew 21:33-46, which formed a section in Childs’ culminating work, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*.⁷ Or, alternatively, you could begin by focusing on one succinct five-page account of the complex task of theological interpretation of Scripture in that same work. Although Childs does not highlight it as such, one brief section (pp. 379-83) entitled “Reading Scriptures in the Light of the Full Divine Reality” provides a compact guide to the critical steps involved in his canonical or theological exegesis of the Bible. The section comes at the end of an extended reflection on the Trinitarian “identity of God” in light of the combined witness of Old and New Testaments, which wrestles with the basic issue of the unity of God within a Trinitarian diversity of modes of being. Childs then asks these questions:

How does one read the scriptures in respect to its chief referent who is

4 Brevard Childs, *Isaiah*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

5 Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*.

6 Brevard Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

7 Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 321-47.

God? Has the Christian interpreter a theological warrant for projecting the reality of Jesus Christ back into the Old Testament? If we now understand the triunity of God, must not the grasp of this reality affect how we now interpret both testaments? How does our fuller knowledge of God's revelation relate to the church's two-fold canon, a part of which it shares with the synagogue?⁸

In response to this series of questions, Childs argues for the necessity of a dialogical and dialectical reading of Scripture across at least four steps, as shown below. Indeed, exegesis does not "proceed in stages within a fixed sequence," but moves "within a circle which encompasses both the movement from text to reality as well as from reality to the text" within the dynamic of the biblical witness.⁹

STEP ONE: DISCERNING THE PLAIN SENSE OF THE TEXT—
STRUGGLING TO LET THE ANCIENT TEXT HAVE ITS SAY

As a first step, especially when interpreting the Old Testament, it is "absolutely necessary to interpret each passage within its historical, literary, and canonical context" in order "to hear the voice of each biblical witness in its own right" and with its own integrity.¹⁰ As much as possible, an Old Testament text must be heard first of all within its ancient Near Eastern historical and Old Testament literary context in "its historical confrontation with ancient Israel." This first step reflects "a wide consensus within the church and academy" through the centuries, even among those who use allegory or other figurative modes of interpretation, to begin to ground all interpretation in the "plain," "literal," or "historical" sense of the biblical text understood as a close and informed study (according to the scholarly conventions of the day and context) of the details, texture, and plain sense of the text in its Old Testament context. The Old Testament text must be allowed its own distinctive voice as one important step in the historically-conditioned and unfolding revelation of the living God interacting with God's people, Israel. To mute this distinctive voice by imposing upon it prematurely the figure of Jesus or a Christian or New Testament framework is to diminish the richness of the biblical witness to the one true God who is both the God of Israel and the God of Jesus Christ.

This step involves the close work of translation, rigorous historical-critical and literary analysis, and attention to the way in which the text has been shaped and embedded in its larger literary or redactional frame so that it is rendered hermeneutically open to successive generations of hearers and readers within its original testamental context (Old or New). Such close and critical literal/historical interpretations of texts will always be partial, provisional, contested, and ongoing. Our knowledge of ancient languages, cultures, historical events, and backgrounds will usually be sufficient to make reasonable sense of most texts. We make the most

8 Ibid., 379.

9 Ibid. Childs discusses his method of theological exegesis as involving three levels or steps. However, I have added a fourth level or step below that I believe is implied in and flows out of Childs' method.

10 Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 379.

persuasive and reasonable arguments that we can. Childs would maintain that the interpreter seeks the best possible reading of the “plain sense,” seeking some form of “authorial intent” as a first and primary step.¹¹ At the same time, however, our knowledge will never be complete. The evidence of ancient languages, culture, and history will always have gaps that resist certainty. Methods of inquiry may be helpful but not always definitive. We are mortals, and our human capacities are finite. So exegesis always begins with struggle and questions and often ends with struggle and questions. Childs was not hesitant to respond to a student’s question that posed some seemingly intractable dilemma associated with a given biblical text by saying, “I don’t know. That’s a question for your generation to struggle with.” And so it will always be. There will always be important questions that remain unresolved.

This first step, the concern to use the best available tools of human inquiry and scholarship to study the Bible as a fully human and historically contextualized literature, is grounded in the doctrine of incarnation—Jesus as truly God and truly human at the same time. God is made known in what is earthly and human. Herein lies the subtle dialectic in the relationship of historical-criticism of the Bible and the Bible as a witness to God. Childs explained it this way:

The Bible in its human, fully time-conditioned form, functions theologically for the church as a witness to God’s divine revelation in Jesus Christ. The church confesses that in this human form, the Holy Spirit unlocks its truthful message to its hearers in the mystery of faith. This theological reading cannot be simply fused with a historical reconstruction of the biblical text, nor conversely, neither can it be separated. This is to say, the Bible’s witness to the creative and salvific activity of God in time and space cannot be encompassed within the categories of historical criticism whose approach filters out this very kerygmatic dimension of God’s activity. In a word, the divine and human dimensions remain inseparably intertwined, but in a highly profound, theological manner. Its ontological relation finds its closest analogy in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, truly man and truly God.¹²

Overemphasizing either the divinity or the humanity of Jesus while downplaying the other leads to theological error (Jesus was a great human but not God, or Jesus was truly God but not really fully human). So too with the Bible, a subtle dialectic is required to hold together its full embodiment in human and historical realities, a dialectic that can be studied and debated with a full confidence and hope that the Bible can offer a true word from God to contemporary readers and hearers through such human interpretation.

11 Brevard Childs, “Critique of Recent Intertextual Canonical Interpretations,” *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 115 (2003): 177.

12 Brevard Childs, “The Canon in Recent Biblical Studies: Reflections on an Era,” *Pro Ecclesia* 14 (2005): 44-45.

STEP TWO: AN INTERTEXTUAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN TWO DISTINCTIVE VOICES—OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS IN CONVERSATION

The second step of a canonical interpretation incorporates and extends the first “literal/historical” reading into a second level of intertextual dialogue between the Old and New Testament witnesses: “This reading proceeds from the fact of a two part canon, and seeks to analyze structural similarities and dissimilarities between the witness of both testaments.”¹³ This step does not involve just tracing a history of ideas or development of traditions. It is rather an analysis of the relationship of similarity and difference between the two testaments grounded in the particularities of the prior literal/historical reading of biblical texts.

Specifically in terms of an understanding of God, what features do the two testaments hold in common respecting the mode, intention, and goal of God’s self-manifestation? A comparison is being made, but neither witness [OT or NT] is absorbed by the other, nor their contexts fused.¹⁴

At this stage, the interpreter should allow for one of many possibilities of how the Old Testament witness and New Testament witness might relate to one another. They may agree, disagree, create a dialectical tension, complement one another, fill in a gap left by the other, or overwhelm and render the other witness largely mute. The key at this point is to analyze the variety of possible relationships between the specifics of an Old Testament and New Testament text or texts.

The theological concern here is to allow the full chorus of diverse biblical voices, from both testaments, to be heard in all their harmony, dissonance, complementarity, or tension. Ever since the second century—when the church rejected the claim of the heretic Marcion, who believed that the Old Testament and its God were inferior to the God of Jesus Christ—the church has affirmed the content of both Old and New Testaments as true vehicles of God’s living Word.

Another practical or historical reason for preserving the distinctiveness of the voices of the Old and New Testaments is that they represent two quite different historical experiences of God’s people. The Old Testament tradition emerges out of what is at least a thousand years of ancient Israel’s experience as the people of God under numerous empires (Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek) and under a great variety of familial, political, social, economic, and religious experiences and conditions, ranging from established kingship to disestablished exile. The Old Testament contains unique resources for “faith for the long haul.” Alongside the Old Testament is the equally important witness of the New Testament, a corpus of literature written within an intense and concentrated timeframe of around sixty years within the context of the ancient Roman empire of the day. The New Testament testifies in a unique way to the indispensable and definitive revelation of God in Jesus Christ. However, the New Testament also assumes the Old Testament as its Scripture and sees itself as its supplement and not its replacement.

But how does Childs think about the relationship between the Old and New

13 Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 380.

14 Ibid.

Testaments? In a quite recent article, he writes,

The Church has always confessed that the Old Testament is an integral part of the Christian Bible because of its witness to Jesus Christ. Of course, just how this confession has been understood has varied in the history of the church. Yet the newness of the New Testament in its witness to Jesus Christ is of a different order from that of the Old Testament. The gospel is neither simply an extension of the old covenant, nor is it to be interpreted merely as a commentary on the Jewish Scriptures, but it is an explosion of God's good news. The theological paradox is that the radically new has already been testified to by the Old (cf. Mk. 1:12; Heb. 1:1).¹⁵

Hence, it is critical to allow the distinctive witness of the two testaments to be heard clearly without fusing the two together prematurely.

But what of the reality of a living Jewish community with whom Christians share their Scripture? How are we to think of the relationship of Jews and Christians? Childs finished writing a book on the apostle Paul just before his death, and it will be published posthumously in the near future. We may get a glimpse into that book and his most recent thinking about the competing visions of Jewish and Christian hope in a 2005 article on the debate over canon in biblical studies:

I do not feel that the profoundly apocalyptic nature of Pauline theology—the cross as divine rectification of the ungodly, gospel versus law, God's eschatological victory over evil—has been adequately reflected in the recent canonical debate. Indeed there is mystery between the church and Israel with which Paul wrestles (Rom. 9-11). Yet there remains a dark side of the New Testament's witness. A hardening has come on part of Israel. Jesus was rejected by his own people and the Messiah of God was crucified. To be sure, reconciliation is a divine promise: "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26). However, it will not be accomplished by religious pluralism or ecumenical inclusivity, but by a divine eschatological event.¹⁶

Of course, Childs was very much committed to generous and substantive interreligious dialogue, particularly with Jewish biblical scholars. But he believed such dialogue should allow each member to speak deeply out of their distinctive religious traditions rather than seeking only a thin or shallow common denominator on which all could agree.

The question of the relationship of Old and New Testaments is a complex and subtle one, reflecting the complexity of the Trinitarian relationships of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as well as the mystery and struggle of the relationship between Israel and the church. As Childs believed and the church testified, the dynamic Trinitarian understanding of God and its implications for biblical in-

15 Childs, "The Canon," 45.

16 Ibid.

terpretation emerged for the church out of the compulsion of the biblical texts themselves.¹⁷ The Trinity was not an alien philosophical imposition on Scripture but a reasoned interpretation out of Scripture that took centuries for the church to develop. In analogy with the doctrine of the Trinity, which sought to preserve the subtle dialectic of the inner unity of God within the diversity of three distinctive persons, fruitful theological interpretation seeks to preserve the distinctiveness of Old and New Testament witnesses even as the interpreter brings them into mutual conversation, relationship, and constructive exchange in the process of biblical exegesis and interpretation toward a concrete and specific witness in a given time and place.

STEP THREE: DISCERNING A TRUE WITNESS TO THE LIVING
GOD THROUGH DIALOGUE AMONG TEXTS, THE WHOLE OF
SCRIPTURE, AND THE CHURCH'S RULE OF FAITH

A third and crucial step involves a process of constructive theological reflection that moves "from the dual witness of scripture to the reality of God to which the witnesses point."¹⁸ The direction of the movement is critical for Childs; the interpreter moves always from a detailed engagement with the particulars of a biblical text to its use as a witness to the divine reality. In other words, deep engagement with the particular contents, texture, and contour of individual biblical texts in Scripture is the primary medium through which God reveals God's self. Childs often reminded his students, "We are neither prophets nor Apostles."¹⁹ The prophets of the Old Testament and the Apostles of the New Testament claimed a direct experience of the reality of God which was then remembered, passed on, and recorded as a witness for future generations. The direction of the move for prophets and Apostles was from divine reality (the experience of God) to biblical witness. The collection of these witnesses into a biblical canon sets the era of the prophets and Apostles off as an era that is now consigned to the past. With the rise of the church's body of Scripture, the church confessed its discovery that now the revelation of the reality of God did not come through an unmediated encounter with the divine. Rather, the revelation of the living God now comes through the witness of the prophets and Apostles as recorded in Scripture. The direction for the community of faith is from biblical witness to divine reality. Any independent claim to knowing the voice or will of God must be tested and judged against the witness of the Bible as discerned within communities of interpretation.

But how does this testing and judging of the truthfulness of an alleged "word of God" occur? It emerges out of the careful and rigorous study of particular biblical texts by interpreters, using resources appropriate to their context and the particular biblical texts being examined. The dialogue also expands to

17 For a recent exegetical illustration of how understanding God as Trinity arises out of the theological exegesis of a particular biblical text like Luke's infancy narrative in its use of the Old Testament, see C. Kavin Rowe, "Luke and the Trinity: An Essay in Ecclesial Biblical Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003), 1-26.

18 Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 380.

19 *Ibid.*, 381.

other particular texts in both testaments that may be related in content, theme, or area of concern. Interpreters also need to consider the overall witness of Scripture. How does the overall portrait of God in Scripture relate to the particular claims of particular biblical texts and their interpretation? At this juncture in the interpretive process, the reader or interpreter necessarily moves from a strictly “literal/historical/plain sense” reading of the biblical texts to a more “figural” or figurative interpretation that, through diverse and complex inner-biblical webs of quotation, allusion, interconnection, metaphor, analogy, extension, and the like, may allow the biblical texts to speak across boundaries of time, space, cultures, and testaments.²⁰

It is important at this stage to pay attention to the ways in which the individual texts being interpreted already in their final form provide guidance for how they are rendered or construed as available to future generations of readers and interpreters. The larger connections made among biblical texts and our own contemporary contexts remain informed by attention to the texture, contours, and particular shaping of individual biblical passages, the editing of biblical books, and the structure and sequence of larger sections of the Bible (e.g., the overall shaping of the Pentateuch as concluding before entry into the promised land, the collection and shaping of the Minor Prophets into a meaningful sequence, or the four-fold form of the New Testament Gospels).

As interpreters, we inevitably come to Scripture with some pre-formed sense of “what it’s all about.” With intentionality or not, people of faith carry around with themselves an overriding sense of the nature of God and what God is up to in the world and in our lives. That overriding sense of God’s character, activity, and will has been shaped by a complex set of dynamics involving our selves, our lives, and experiences in faith communities, Scripture, our traditions, our cultures, and our contexts. Through it all, we trust that the Spirit of God has been at work in us and through us. But part of the interpretive dialogue involves our constant testing of that inner sense of “what it’s all about” with an external testimony of other voices that we have grown to trust by virtue of shared vision, experience, and sense of belonging.

Thus, within this step of fuller constructive dialogue of discernment, the church’s tradition of creeds, confessions, catechisms, and other testimonies provides an additional helpful resource. Such traditions make up the church’s operative Rule of Faith, which has taken various forms in the life of the church, depending on the community or tradition of interpretation. In addition, some sampling of excellent interpreters in the history of Christian and Jewish interpretation on a given biblical text may provide insight and inspiration in generating theological understandings of a scriptural passage. As contemporary interpreters, we cannot simply duplicate the methods of our ancestors in the faith, but we can continue to learn from them. These various forms of the Rule of Faith, confessional docu-

20 On figural reading from a canonical perspective, see Christopher Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) and Stanley Walters, ed., *Go Figure! Figuration in Biblical Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008).

ments, and the specific historical interpretations ultimately claim a grounding in Scripture itself. For practical reasons, the truth and faithfulness of that grounding must often be simply assumed by working pastors, teachers, and leaders of faith communities. At the same time, however, aspects of the truth of such grounding of the church's tradition in all its richness must be regularly tested and clarified ever anew in each succeeding generation against the primary witness of Scripture.

Along these lines, the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone") did not historically claim that Scripture is the *only* norm or source of revelation. Rather, Scripture alone was the *primary* norm and resource for Christian faith and life. Scripture stands *alongside* the traditions of the church, which play an important but ultimately secondary role in witnessing to the living God of Jesus Christ. But in the end, even the larger witness of the Bible and the church's tradition are not the final endpoint of interpretation. These ultimately serve the purpose of witnessing to and enabling an encounter with a divine reality that is not fully captured in them. Childs would remind us that the interpreter's fuller grasp of God's reality which he or she "brings to the biblical text is not a collection of right doctrine or some moral idea, but a response to a living God" who graciously lets God's self be known.²¹ The Bible's chief referent is the real and living God, the God and Father of Jesus Christ, revealed by the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. It is this living God who is the final arbiter of our interpretation, standing over it in judgment or affirmation. We hope and trust that God uses our human, provisional, and flawed interpretations of Scripture ultimately for the purposes of God's work and will for the creation. In the end, we are confident that God will have God's way with us and with God's creation. There should be both fear and hope in that confidence.

STEP FOUR: VOICING, DECIDING, PRACTICING AND LIVING OUT THE BIBLICAL WITNESS IN A PARTICULAR TIME AND PLACE

Just as John's Gospel testifies that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us in Jesus Christ, full of grace and truth (John 1:14), so our exegesis of Scripture does not end until God, through us as earthen vessels, has somehow "put our interpretation into play" in the world. It may be voiced in preaching, prayer, or hymns in worship. It may shape decisions made within communities of faith or in daily vocations of family, work, and citizenship. Our exegesis may lead to changes in our practices and habits. It may shape how we live, who or what we love, what we yearn and hope for. Thus, part of the potential dialogue involved in exegesis and biblical interpretation includes the particularities and rich texture of events, symbols, activities, words, cultures, and contexts in which we live. Just as the richness of words, themes, and metaphors of the Old Testament resonated and exploded in countless new ways in light of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, so the words of the Old and New Testaments together continue to resonate, explode, illumine, and unfold in unanticipated ways when we lay them next to the realities of our lives, communities, and world.

The key task for theological exegesis is to preserve the full richness of the

21 Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 382.

scriptural witness so that the wealth and diversity of its theological treasure can be kept ready and waiting to be taken up in unanticipated, surprising new ways and contexts through which the Spirit of God in Jesus Christ may “blow where it wills” (John 3:8). There is a subtle dialectic between this wide arena of biblical freedom and diversity that operates alongside the need for guiding, and sometimes contested, normative theological boundaries that have emerged through the struggles and debates over Scripture in the church’s long history. In another section of his *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, Childs reflects on the task of biblical theology in light of recent, new realities involving significant shifts toward the Southern Hemisphere in global Christianity:

From the perspective of many of the Third World churches there is a renewed interest in the creative role of the Spirit in bringing forth new forms of the church’s life and mission. In this context one is reminded of the resistance of the early Jewish Christians to Paul’s new ministry to the Gentiles and how acceptance of his case only came when it was argued that God had given the Gentiles “the Holy Spirit just as he did to us” (Acts 15:8). “Why then do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples?” (v. 10). One of the great concerns of the modern ecumenical church is to respond to a growing awareness that the future life of the church cannot be any longer identified with its dominant Western shape, but to welcome and encourage indigenous forms of Christian response. Perhaps the major contribution of Biblical Theology to this complex issue [of the identity and mission of the church] is to illuminate the full diversity of the biblical witness regarding the church. Clearly no one form of polity has the sole claim to biblical warrants. Yet at the same time to make clear the fixed parameters which are drawn by Scripture outside of which the same threats of Gnosticism, Judaizers, and paganism are ever present in new forms. No Christian theologian should question the decisive role of the Holy Spirit in revitalizing older forms and creating new. However, the basic contribution of dogmatic theology will lie in insisting that the role of the Holy Spirit be understood as the Spirit of Jesus Christ and that the Spirit not be assigned an independent role in the service of private groups, racial or sexual identity, or national ideology. The frequently used expression “open to the future” in itself is inadequate to insure that it is the future of Jesus Christ within the kingdom of God which is being heralded, rather than the empty promises of an Adam Smith or Karl Marx.²²

Childs has often been critical of attempts to reduce the Bible and the work of the Spirit to the promotion of one particular or dominant human ideology, agenda, political program, philosophy, exegetical method, or hermeneutical approach. If we are true to the witness of Scripture, he believed, then what God has done and will do ought to be the primary concern of our interpretation of the Bible. The full

22 Ibid., 448-49.

richness and diversity of this biblical witness ought to be preserved within the wide but definitive boundaries of what the church has learned over its long history about faithful interpretation of the Bible. Here, Childs reflects the theologian Karl Barth's sharp critique of the identification of God's kingdom and will with a particular human ideology in his own time and context—the demonic National Socialist agenda in Nazi Germany. Thus, Childs is often wary of proposals, methods, ideologies, or philosophical approaches that seek to reduce the whole diverse witness of the Old and New Testaments to one overriding human-centered enterprise that claims to offer ultimate salvation.

Childs' critiques were often wide-ranging against a variety of biblical interpretations, both on the right and the left of the political spectrum, against both evangelicals and liberals, against both historical critics and literary interpreters. Any method, philosophy, or approach had the potential to be helpful, but it could also be misused by those attempting to interpret the Bible theologically. Even quite recently, Childs continued publishing his assessments and critiques of theological interpretations of Scripture. For example, Childs surveyed a number of biblical interpretations that employed the post-structuralist literary approach of intertextuality. He acknowledged its potential usefulness as an exegetical tool in a canonical approach, but he also critiqued a number of scholars for wrong turns they took with the method in attempting theological interpretations of texts like the near-sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22.²³

In another article, Childs surveyed some recent uses of speech-act theory (developed by J. L. Austin and John Searle in the 1920s) in biblical interpretation.²⁴ In particular, he focused on work done by the Reformed philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff in his book *Divine Discourse*, which Childs viewed as “deeply flawed.” At the same time, Childs noted a more illuminating use of speech-act theory by Anthony Thiselton in his commentary on 1 Corinthians. Again, any method has the potential to be useful to interpreting Scripture theologically; the key is for the interpreter to stay within the “canonical” or confessional context of Scripture, interpreting from faith to faith, rather than standing over against the biblical text from a modern, secular, “objective” or external context. The particular method or philosophical approach should serve the theological reading of Scripture; Scripture should not be made subservient to a particular philosophy, method, or agenda. Childs concludes the article with a reference to Reformed theologians and the history of Princeton Theological Seminary, where he received his first divinity degree:

I would also hope that it has become apparent just how high are the theological stakes in this debate. Many of us can recall, often with much pain, that generation of Reformed theologians, especially in North America, who were led astray in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield of Princeton sought to defend

23 Childs, “Critique,” 173-84.

24 Brevard Childs, “Speech-act Theory and Biblical Interpretation,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005): 375-92.

Christian orthodoxy within the framework of Baconian philosophy. It would be sad indeed if a new generation of evangelicals would once again commit themselves uncritically to a new and untested philosophical model, allegedly designed for the twenty-first century.²⁵

CONCLUSION

The canonical approach to theological exegesis of Scripture offered by Brevard Childs is a complex enterprise with multiple steps, dimensions, and concerns. A practicing minister struggling to exegete and preach on a biblical text each week could not perform an exhaustive canonical interpretation of a given text. Nevertheless, Childs hoped his work in some way would guide the orientation and posture of working pastors, teachers, and readers of Scripture in seeking the word of the living God for their congregation, community, and context. This essay has sought to make Childs' method and approach a bit more understandable and accessible for just such "workers in the vineyard."

Childs summarizes the steps of his method of theological exegesis in *Biblical Theology of Old and New Testaments* with these words:

In the end, what is being suggested is that genuine biblical exegesis within the context of the church requires a multiple-level approach to the text. The interpreter struggles to hear precisely the form of the witness as it entered into its concrete historical form. The function of the canonical collection is to assure that this corpus of the prophetic and apostolic witness cannot be replaced, but remains the vehicle for continuing revelation. At the same time the reality of God testified to in the Bible, and experienced through the confirmation of God's Spirit, functions on a deeper level to instruct the reader toward an understanding of God that leads from faith to faith. Because of a fuller knowledge of the reality of God revealed through reading the whole corpus of scripture, the biblical texts resonate in a particular Christian fashion which has been of course confirmed by the church's liturgical experience.²⁶

Then Childs steps aside and allows the seventeenth-century poet and Anglican priest John Donne to have the last word. And so shall I:

Perhaps John Donne has put it best: My *God*, my *God*, Thou art a *direct God*, may I not say a *literall God*, a *God* that wouldest bee understood *literally*, and according to the *plaine sense* of all that thou saiest? But thou art also (*Lord* I intend it to thy *glory* . . .) thou art a *figurative*, a

25 Ibid., 392.

26 Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 382.

metaphoricall God too: A God in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyages, such peregrinations to fetch remote and precious metaphors, such extensions . . . such Curtaines of Allegories . . . O, what words but thine, can express the inexpressible texture, and composition of thy Word.

*Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, XIX Expostulation.*²⁷

Dennis T. Olson is the Charles T. Haley Professor of Old Testament Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary.

27 Ibid., 382-383.

BREVARD S. CHILDS' CONTRIBUTION TO OLD TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION: AN EVANGELICAL APPRECIATION AND ASSESSMENT

Richard Schultz

Old Testament scholar Christopher Seitz, writing in 1994, calls Brevard S. Childs' *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* "a book with arguably the greatest impact on Old Testament scholarship in this century."¹ This is not to imply, however, that Childs' canonical approach to Scripture has been embraced warmly by all Old Testament scholars. James Barr claims that Childs' depiction of the "state of disarray or breakdown" of "critical study" and "the speculative element in its reconstructions" in his *Introduction* "is in fact very close to the conservative/fundamentalist one." Barr fears that Childs' work will usher in "a 'post-critical' era" and, due to Childs' stature as "a clearly non-conservative scholar," will "be quoted by conservative polemicists for the next hundred years."² Childs' response to Barr was characteristically positive: "If some Fundamentalists find portions of the book agreeable, I can only rejoice that they are not completely without light." In fact, in his opinion, his approach could prove to be an even greater threat to such individuals than traditional historical criticism "because it cannot be all too quickly dismissed as unbelief."³

Brevard Childs' sudden passing in July 2007 presents those of us who were privileged to benefit personally from his warm and wise mentoring—as well as those who knew him only through his writings—with an occasion to pause in the midst of the sometimes-frenetic pace of our academic and ecclesial activities and to reflect on our personal loss. It is also an occasion to consider how great our gain has been from his scholarly work, which, for nearly four decades, he devoted to defending and developing "the thesis that the canon of the Christian church is

1 C.R. Seitz, *Word without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 102. Chapter 9, "'We Are Not Prophets or Apostles': The *Biblical Theology* of B. S. Childs," which contains this quote, originally appeared in *Dialog* 33 (1994): 89–93. Seitz's comment refers to B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

2 J. Barr, "Childs' *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 16 (1980): 14–15, see also 22–23. He makes a similar charge in *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 148. Barr's sharp criticism of Childs' work continued unabated for more than two decades in numerous publications.

3 Childs, "Response to Reviewers of *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*," *JSOT* 16 (1980): 58–59. In his response, Childs also expressed his hope that "the widespread, but simplistic, categorizing of biblical scholars into liberal and conservative camps could be overcome," 59.

the most appropriate context from which to do Biblical Theology.”⁴ Although not many of Childs’ wide-ranging publications focused on the methodological problem of how best to do biblical theology, recovering the theological richness of the biblical text for the church was consistently one of his central concerns.

As one who identifies himself with the evangelical movement in terms of theological orientation⁵ and institutional and organizational affiliations,⁶ I have been encouraged in this essay to reflect personally on the impact of Childs’ life and work on my development as an evangelical scholar as well as to survey the evangelical reception of his canonical approach. In the process, I will seek to assess the extent to which James Barr’s fears have been realized by simplistic references to Brevard Childs in support of anti-critical positions rather than Childs’ hopes for more nuanced appropriations of his work that demonstrate that we are not totally devoid of intellectual light.⁷ Accordingly, after briefly summarizing my own formation as an evangelical advocate of a modified canonical approach, I will summarize the initial reception of Childs’ work in evangelical publications and later appropriations of his approach by evangelical Old Testament scholars, before concluding by noting his major contributions to evangelical biblical interpretation.⁸

1. PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Laying the groundwork in my B.C. era (before Childs). My formal theological education began in the fall of 1974 in a small German seminary following a year of evangelistic children’s and youth work in Austria and West Germany. Growing up in a mid-sized evangelical church in southeastern Wisconsin, I had considered engaging in some type of ministry-related work overseas following my undergraduate education; my year in Europe allowed me to explore Christian

4 Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 99.

5 I have in mind here the definition of “evangelical” recently suggested by Timothy Larsen in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. T. Larsen and D. J. Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

6 I received a Master of Divinity degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 1977 and served as a visiting instructor there in 1983–84. Following a decade as a Lecturer in Old Testament and Semitic Languages at the Freie Theologische Akademie in Giessen, Germany (1985–95), I took up my current teaching post at Wheaton College. All three of these institutions affirm biblical inerrancy in their respective statements of faith. I am a member of the Evangelical Theological Society and the Institute of Biblical Research and, while in Germany, was a member of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians and the Tyndale Fellowship.

7 R. W. L. Moberly vividly describes this concern: “The phoenix of a conservatism which simply studies the final text and eschews any kind of historical criticism might swiftly arise from the ashes,” *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34*, JSOTSup Series 22 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 22.

8 I am grateful to the editors of this journal for giving me the opportunity to pay tribute through my essay to my doctoral mentor, Brevard Childs. In preparing this essay, I have benefited from the comments of Daniel Block, Iain Provan, and Christopher Seitz, as well as from the careful editing work of my assistant, Brittany Kim.

ministry options while utilizing my recently-completed German major.

In January 1975, I transferred to TEDS near Deerfield, IL, where I was drawn immediately to the biblical languages and exegetical courses, switching in the fall of 1975 from a Missions to a Biblical Studies emphasis. My exposure to biblical criticism during my MDiv studies was minimal, consisting of the often-polemical anti-critical approach of *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* by Gleason L. Archer, Jr.,⁹ plus brief readings from Hermann Gunkel (*The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*) and Albrecht Alt ("The God of the Fathers"). My grounding in the biblical and cognate languages was strong, however, and I was encouraged by several professors and mission leaders to pursue doctoral study. Walter Kaiser, Jr., and Kenneth Kantzer, in particular, recommended that I apply to study at Yale under Brevard Childs. While I was considering the options, James Barr's *Fundamentalism* was published.¹⁰ Barr's harsh, though unfair, attack on conservative biblical scholarship¹¹ confirmed my desire to do graduate study in a religious studies rather than an ancient Near Eastern studies department.

Historical-critical force-feeding and canonical baby steps at Yale. Arriving at Yale in the fall of 1978, I soon felt out of place. At a picnic for new Religious Studies doctoral students, New Testament scholar Wayne Meeks gave me a puzzled look when I told him that I intended to focus on Old Testament theology and exegesis during my time at Yale, informing me that, in his opinion, no further interpretive insights into the biblical texts could be achieved using traditional methods. As the only entering student that fall in either OT or Northwest Semitics, I was without an academic companion. I enrolled in doctoral seminars in which I appeared to be the only one not well-versed in critical methodologies. As I later described my experience during the first semester at Yale, I felt like I was seated under a ping-pong table without a paddle but trying in vain to participate in the game that the others were playing, as they discussed Bernhard Duhm's classic commentary on Isaiah. Traditional evangelical positions were not even mentioned as interpretive options, even though the majority of my classmates had graduated from evangelical seminaries. I had fewer difficulties in the Middle Egyptian course in which we read ancient wisdom texts. (The professor referred to me simply as "that student who knows German.")

Brevard Childs soon realized that I needed some remedial work and offered me a tutorial in form criticism during my second semester. Childs told me at that time that his/their goal¹² was not to draw me away from my theological moorings

9 G. L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974).

10 J. Barr, *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977).

11 His criticism is directed, in particular, against publications by "an expert in some environing subject, such as Egyptology or Assyriology" (*ibid.*, 130). His most blatant (and inaccurate) claim is that "probably none of the writers of conservative evangelical literature on the Bible *who are actual professional biblical scholars* can be found to be so completely negative towards the main trend in biblical scholarship as are those like Kitchen who look on the subject from outside" (131).

12 Childs preferred not to refer to any of the OT doctoral students at Yale as

but rather to prepare me as well as possible to return to and effectively serve my theological constituency, and he later continued to affirm me in my various evangelical academic appointments. I also was told of an earlier graduate of an evangelical seminary whose Yale dissertation demonstrated an inadequate mastery of historical-critical issues, and Childs hoped to help me to avoid a similar outcome. During my subsequent semesters at Yale, I engaged in my own “struggle” to employ newly-acquired historical-critical methods in my exegetical work while still seeking to understand the Old Testament “as Christian Scripture.”¹³ At times, I questioned whether I could thrive or even survive at Yale without theological compromise.

During my first year at Yale, Childs’ *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* was published. I enrolled in his Old Testament Theology course, his class lectures forming the basis of another book.¹⁴ I later participated in a small, informal seminar group that considered the ideas that he was developing as he focused on the New Testament,¹⁵ and I audited a course on the History of Interpretation in which Childs repeatedly asked his students what constitutes good interpretation, regardless of an (ancient) interpreter’s cultural and theological preunderstandings. I had the privilege of serving as a teaching assistant for his fall semester OT Interpretation course at Yale Divinity School, observing how students listened with rapt attention as he juxtaposed a historical-critical with a canonical reading of Genesis 22 or the Book of Deuteronomy. Rolf Rendtorff visited YDS and delivered a lecture in which he expressed his appreciation for the canonical approach, but to us his methodology sounded more like slightly-modified redaction criticism.

Aware of my ongoing awkwardness in using historical-critical methods, Childs recommended several safe dissertation topics to me (e.g., studying “sleep” or “non-verbal expressions” in the OT). However, he finally gave his approval to a subject that had interested me since my seminary studies: the significance of parallel texts within the OT canonical corpus. He expressed concern, however, that I may have selected an interpretive issue which, though significant, might be “unsolvable.” With a primary focus on Isaiah, my dissertation was entitled “Prophecy and Quotation: A Methodological Study.”¹⁶

Although Brevard Childs’ instruction and publications made a deep impact on me during my years at Yale, I also absorbed much from him as he interacted

“his,” despite his significant impact on us as *Doktorvater*, instead introducing us simply as those “enrolled in the Yale program.”

13 I am alluding here to Childs’ most recent book, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

14 B. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

15 This research culminated in *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (London: SCM, 1984).

16 It was subsequently updated and published as *The Search for Quotation: Verbal Parallels in the Prophets*, JSOTSup Series 180 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

with me and others as a scholar-mentor. He was always interested in my personal life, not just in my academic progress. Childs' academic achievements were prodigious, but he never advertised them. As students, we learned of honorary doctorates conferred on him during a recent sabbatical in Europe only by paging through his wife Ann's scrapbook of their travels. He graciously responded to his own critics with humor and humility and offered us detailed, honest, and helpful comments on our work. He characterized one of my dissertation chapters as "very British," another as marred by "conservative polemic." He also worried that the final section would "sink the entire battleship" unless I revised it significantly.

Life in a Childs-less world, then in an increasingly Childs-friendly world. Unfortunately, I had little contact with Childs following my graduation from Yale, partly due to my move to Germany, where I taught for a decade.¹⁷ Childs also avoided academic conferences where so much academic fire-power was assembled under one roof but generated, in his words, "so little light." In German academic circles in the late 1980s and early 1990s, few had heard of Brevard Childs' approach. For example, at the Society of Biblical Literature 1993 International Meeting in Münster, Rolf Rendtorff's effort to explain the nature and value of a canonical perspective was met with confusion and resistance.¹⁸

Coming to Wheaton College in 1995, I encountered a very different situation. Students and colleagues commented repeatedly on the privilege that had been mine to study with Childs.

It was from Brevard Childs, not from my evangelical peers, that I learned the value of a close reading of a text and of holding diachronic and synchronic approaches in tension. In several of my publications, I have addressed canonical issues explicitly.¹⁹ More importantly, in teaching an OT Criticism course annually,

17 A personal highlight while there was the opportunity that my wife and I had to take Childs to our favorite pastry shop in Marburg, Germany prior to his public lecture at the Philipps University at Erhard Gerstenberger's invitation.

18 His paper was entitled "'Kanonische Auslegung' im Kontext der historisch-kritischen Bibelwissenschaft." Rendtorff (Heidelberg) was the first prominent German OT scholar to appreciate and then begin to develop his own canonical approach. Norbert Lohfink (Munich) and Erich Zenger (Münster) also soon moved in a canonical direction. For a broader treatment of the recent German discussion of canon, see Childs, "The Canon in Recent Biblical Studies: Reflections on an Era" in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. C. G. Bartholomew et al., Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 33–57, especially 43–53.

19 This is a central focus in "Unity or Diversity in Wisdom Theology? A Canonical and Covenantal Perspective," *Tyndale Bulletin* 48, no. 2 (1997): 271–306; and "What is 'Canonical' about a Canonical Biblical Theology? Genesis as a Case Study of Recent Old Testament Proposals," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. S. Hafemann (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 83–99; and a secondary focus in "The King in the Book of Isaiah," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. P. E. Satterthwaite, R. S. Hess, and G. J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 141–65; "Integrating Old Testament Theology and Exegesis: Literary, Thematic, and Canonical Issues," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. W. VanGemeren, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan: 1997),

I seek to give an accurate understanding of Brevard Childs' major contributions and concerns (including those regarding trends in evangelical biblical scholarship) from my first-hand exposure to them and to encourage students to undergird their exegetical techniques with a canonical perspective. And, on occasion, I stop and ask myself whether I am interacting with the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students entrusted to me at Wheaton College in the same caring and competent manner in which Brevard Childs did with us.

2. RESPONSES TO CHILDS' WORK BY EVANGELICALS²⁰

To be sure, Barr correctly predicted that some evangelicals would exploit Childs' critique of historical criticism. On a current website called "Open Source Theology," which serves the "emerging church," one can find the following curious posting from 23 May 2002:

Canonical Criticism | *I don't care about all that other stuff! What can you tell me now?*

Canonical criticism doesn't give a rip about all that authorship and dating stuff. It is concerned with how the texts are used now: as faith documents for Jewish and Christian communities. It is interested in how we would read the Bible for devotional purposes, preparing a sermon, or trying to

185–205; and "The Ties that Bind: Intertextuality, the Identification of Verbal Parallels, and Reading Strategies," *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. P. L. Redditt and A. Schart, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 325 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 27–45.

20 In this section I will focus on general assessments by evangelicals and by evangelical OT scholars in particular, leaving it to others to summarize his impact on evangelical NT scholarship. In doing so, I arbitrarily leave untreated the work of many conservative biblical scholars who have expressed a profound appreciation for Childs in their publications but lack an evangelical institutional affiliation. On the basis of these criteria, I should have included the work of Christopher R. Seitz, in light of his recent appointment as Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Wycliffe College, the University of Toronto. A former student and colleague as well as close friend of Childs, Seitz is currently the most prominent proponent of many of Childs' canonical emphases. I am excluding Seitz's contribution here due to the volume of his relevant publications, assuming that many readers of this essay will be familiar with them. His most thorough essay in this regard is "The Canonical Approach and Theological Interpretation," in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. C. G. Bartholomew et al., Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 58–110. For an example of Seitz's interpretation of the "canonical final form" in which he interacts with Childs' reading of the same texts, see "'You are my Servant, You are the Israel in whom I will be Glorified': The Servant Songs and the Effect of Literary Context in Isaiah," *Calvin Theological Journal* 39 (2004): 117–34. In any case, my summary makes no claims of being comprehensive. Furthermore, for the most part, I will seek to avoid giving my evaluation of these diverse assessments. An essay that overlaps somewhat with mine is Stephen B. Chapman's "Reclaiming Inspiration for the Bible," in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, 167–206. In his helpful review of recent evangelical understandings of biblical inspiration, Chapman discusses some of the same scholars and publications, including a lengthy treatment of Carl Henry; I have sought to avoid repetition in content.

figure out some personal theology. It rebels against breaking down the text into little bits and, as far as I can tell, advocates a completely uncritical approach to Bible reading. Most Christians are blissfully unaware of debates surrounding the Bible's historical background, let alone the fine details of authorship and dating. Canonical Criticism allows us to see the Bible as most of us do: separated from its roots and plonked into our 21st century lives.²¹

On a personal level, occasionally I find it necessary to correct a graduate student who proposes a study of the biblical text exclusively in its "final canonical form" as a means of avoiding any interaction with historical or compositional issues. Overall, however, Childs' work has received the same mixed responses within evangelical circles as within the broader academic community, although for different reasons.²²

Positive assessments. Some early positive responses to Childs' work could easily go undetected. In setting forth the method of "narrative interpretation" to be used in his 1981 Cambridge dissertation on Exodus 32–34, Walter Moberly refers repeatedly to Childs in offering theological arguments "for the importance of interpreting the final form of the text."²³ The expression "final form" is one of many coined or commonly used by Childs in his publications; their presence in publications in the 1980s may signal that the author is a former student or proponent of Childs' approach. For example, in a 1987 essay on Jeremiah 45, Marion Taylor, a former student of Childs, summarizes the major scholarly positions that constitute "the present impasse" before moving "beyond a solely historically-referential reading" to focus on the chapter's superscription and present placement within Jeremiah. These offer us "hermeneutical guides," leading us to "construe Baruch's outcry against Yahweh theologically" and "rendering his persona typologically as a righteous sufferer."²⁴ Brevard Childs' impact on the foundational terminology and approach of this essay is unmistakable, even though he is not cited until footnote 59. More significantly, the 1982 OT survey textbook, *Old*

21 Open Source Theology, "Introduction to biblical criticism: Canonical Criticism," <http://www.opensourcetheology.net/node/653>. This post by "mars-hill" was strongly criticized by Jeff j. on August 27, 2005 and subsequently corrected on September 11, 2005 as "Canonical Criticism | Second Attempt" by replacing the personal summary with quotations from Childs' 1979 *Introduction* and from Jeff j.

22 The predominantly negative assessment given in a "Book Review Session" at the SBL 2007 Annual Meeting in San Diego of C. Seitz's hermeneutical proposals in his most recent monograph, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets* (Studies in Theological Interpretation; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), indicated how little impact Childs' lifework has had on many historical-critical scholars.

23 Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 18–21. In a later monograph, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism*, *Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), xiii, Moberly acknowledges his "indebtedness" to Childs even more directly.

24 M. A. Taylor, "Jeremiah 45: The Problem of Placement," *JSOT* 37 (1987): 79–98.

Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament, authored by three Fuller Theological Seminary professors—William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush—lists Childs more often in its footnotes than any other modern scholar.²⁵

This is not surprising, since one of the earliest advocates of the canonical approach was Gerald T. Sheppard, a Fuller graduate as well as former student and close friend of Childs. In a 1974 essay published in a Fuller student-edited journal, he summarizes the early developments and salient features of Childs' "canon criticism" and somewhat optimistically predicts the rise of "a distinctly American school of canon-critical expositors"²⁶ before discussing four implications for evangelical hermeneutics. First of all, Sheppard faults the practitioners of both the historical-grammatical and the historical-critical approaches to exegesis with attempting merely to "reconstruct" a "'lost' historical context" or intention, in effect "de-canonizing the literature." This is because the "canonical shape and context of sacred traditions" involve the shedding of "those elements of particularity" that reduce Christian Scripture's "trans-historical capacity . . . to confront each new generation directly with an imperishable Word of God."²⁷ Second, canon criticism clarifies the function of "historical detail" in a particular text. The canonical shape signals "the importance or unimportance of history-like statements." It alone defines "what historicity is central to the confession of faith" and what is merely "dressing."²⁸ Third, with its focus on the community of faith, canon criticism requires theological interpretation to engage in dialogue with its "post-canonical traditions," i.e., the history of exegesis and dogmatics. Fourth, canon criticism keeps expository sermons from relying on strained analogies between the ancient and contemporary. It reminds us that Scripture has been shaped in order to address us directly today with the Word of God, even if this entails (re)defining inspiration in terms of "the uniqueness of the canonical context of the church through which the Holy Spirit works."²⁹

Nearly a decade later, in 1983, Sheppard addressed evangelicals in a second

25 W. S. LaSor, D. A. Hubbard, and F. W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) lists Childs 41 times in its "Author Index," followed in frequency of mention by H. H. Rowley (34 times) and John Bright (33 times). The expanded second edition (1996) mentions Childs only 20 times. Similarly, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* by Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) cites Childs more often than any other OT scholar (21 times), except for references to Longman's own publications. In the 2006 edition, Childs slides to fifth place.

26 G. T. Sheppard, "Canon Criticism: The Proposal of Brevard Childs and an Assessment for Evangelical Hermeneutics," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 4 (1974): 10. Sheppard wrote the essay while a doctoral student at Yale.

27 *Ibid.*, 13.

28 *Ibid.*, 14.

29 *Ibid.*, 16–17, citing Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 104. In this respect, the traditional understanding of original authors is superseded by the normative canonical context. See Sheppard, "Canonical Criticism," in *Anchor Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. D. N. Freedman, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 861–62.

essay concerning the “canon contextual” approach, as he now terms it, noting that both he and Childs have dropped the term “canon criticism.” Sheppard’s primary purpose in this essay is to summarize and strongly refute Barr’s most recent attack on Childs.³⁰ He concludes by reaffirming goals of Childs’ approach: to address “the question of how one uses the results of criticism, conservative or liberal, in such a way as to enhance and illuminate a text, any text” and to give priority to “a scriptural text and context because of our pragmatic concern with a living faith.” Thus, what he and Childs are promoting is a “new vision of the biblical text” rather than simply a new and improved interpretive “method.”³¹

A 1982 essay by Frank Spina, originally delivered to the Wesleyan Theological Society, remains one of the most extensive comparisons between Childs and James Sanders,³² the two Old Testament scholars most closely associated with the canonical approach.³³ Spina concludes that “much is compelling” in both of their approaches and that they are asking the right questions, before suggesting seven questions that Childs needs to answer (and five for Sanders). These questions can be viewed as criticisms, most of which others have also expressed (e.g., the hermeneutical role of the critical method, the relationship between theology and history, evidence that pre-critical interpretation was canonical, canon within a canon, exclusive focus on one canonical witness, use of LXX by NT authors, and normativity of the shape of the Hebrew canon for Christians). Spina’s assessment of canonical criticism is reserved. Unwilling to align himself with either Childs or Sanders, he derives from their work an agenda for further discussion, preferably in an ecumenical setting. Of particular interest for him are the relationships between the historical task and biblical theology, between canon and the nature and authority of Scripture, between canon and the believing community, and between hermeneutics and theology.³⁴

In 1985, Stephen Reid offered one of the earliest essays on how to incorpo-

30 Sheppard, “Barr on Canon and Childs: Can one Read the Bible as Scripture?” *TSF Bulletin* 7 (1983): 2–4. Sheppard is responding here to Barr’s *Holy Scripture*.

31 *Ibid.*, 4.

32 F. A. Spina, “Canonical Criticism: Childs versus Sanders,” in *Interpreting God’s Word for Today: An Inquiry into Hermeneutics from a Biblical Theological Perspective*, ed. J. E. Hartley and R. L. Shelton (Anderson, IN: 1982), 165–94.

33 It was J. A. Sanders of Claremont University who coined the term “canonical criticism,” which Childs later rejected. Sanders’ seminal contributions on this approach include (in chronological order) *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972); “Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of Canon,” in *Magnalia Dei, The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright*, ed. F. M. Cross, W. E. Lemke, and P. D. Miller, Jr. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 531–60; “Hermeneutics in True and False Prophecy,” in *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology*, ed. G. W. Coats and B. O. Long (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 21–41; *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); “Canon (Hebrew Bible),” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 837–52.

34 Spina, “Canonical Criticism,” 186–89.

rate “Canon/Canonical Criticism” into “An Evangelical Approach to Scripture.”³⁵ Reid opens the essay by affirming that approaches “such as canon, canonical and canonical-contextual present important tools for the evangelical exegetical process,” listing as major proponents Joseph Blenkinsopp, Walter Brueggemann, Brevard Childs, James Sanders, and Gerald Sheppard.³⁶ As with the monograph-length assessments of Childs to follow, Reid appreciates aspects of the canonical approach but insists on making several revisions. For example, unhappy with Childs’ exclusive “text-centered” focus, Reid also wishes to draw on philosophical movements, such as American Pragmatism and the Frankfurt School, to provide “theoretical building blocks in the hermeneutics of canon-contextual analysis” and modern archaeology to reconstruct the ancient “material cultures,” thus giving us essential insight into the believing communities that produced Scripture.³⁷ He also appears to have a broader understanding than Childs of the “believing community.” Moreover, unlike Childs, he views the multivalence of biblical texts (i.e., there is no one correct interpretation) and pluralism within the Bible as the key features that render it “adaptable” to the changing needs of later faith communities. Finally, he insists that Childs’ high valuation of *historically* pre-critical exegesis must include *methodologically* pre-critical “underrepresented” (i.e., minority) voices as well. When Reid sets forth his “method,” however, it becomes increasingly clear that his understanding of “canonical criticism” is much closer to Brueggemann and Sanders than to Childs and Sheppard and may consist of little more than a focus on the “received form” of the text and the integral relationship between Scripture and the believing community—precisely what Barr feared.

In order to fully appreciate Childs’ contribution, one needs to understand the context in which it arose, which is a central concern of Walter Moberly’s 1988 essay.³⁸ His succinct description is that Childs “comes to the Bible as a *Christian theologian*,” attempting to “establish a post-liberal, post-enlightenment view” that affirms the inseparability of “the historical and evaluative tasks” (i.e., what the text meant and means).³⁹ Moberly does not directly endorse Childs’ program but offers only minor criticisms after summarizing its major elements.

First of all, he considers Childs’ use of the terms “canon” and “canonical” to be non-essential and to lead to distracting debates. Second, he is concerned by the paucity of textual evidence that the biblical tradents shared the kind of hermeneutical concerns that Childs posits. Third, he wonders whether the canonical shape of the biblical books offers a sufficient interpretive guide to limit the production

35 S. Reid, “An Evangelical Approach to Scripture,” *TSF Bulletin* 8 (1985): 2–5.

36 *Ibid.*, 2. In the essay he also commends materialist readings, a rather strange bedfellow for Childs; Reid sees the connection in their common emphasis on “issues of personal and social transformation.”

37 *Ibid.*

38 W. Moberly, “The Church’s Use of the Bible: The Work of Brevard Childs,” *Expository Times* 99 (1988): 104–9. See also his brief review, “The Canonical Approach,” *Expository Times* 103 (1992): 119–20.

39 Moberly, “The Church’s Use,” 105.

of “conflicting and unacceptable interpretations.”⁴⁰

Theodore Letis offers a more enthusiastic appraisal of Childs in 1991.⁴¹ Letis turns to Childs’ canonical approach as offering an “opportunity” for overcoming what Francis Schaeffer in 1984 called “the great evangelical disaster.”⁴² In Letis’ view, in approaching the canonical texts in a post-critical way, Childs overcomes the impasse resulting from the conflicting uses of the Bible in the Academy and the Church, while respecting the autonomy of each within its own sphere. The opportunity offered by the canonical approach, therefore, is “not to have to take sides.” Its attraction for Letis is that it “takes seriously all aspects of Biblical criticism—something neither the Warfield nor the Packer model will allow for—and yet permits the Bible to retain its sacred text status at the canonical level, something Barth disparaged.” At the same time, it encourages the rediscovery of “the rich, theological corpus of the Protestant dogmatic traditions” (i.e., pre-critical) that also approached Scripture “canonically.”⁴³

Negative assessments. Not surprisingly, some of the early evangelical responses to Childs’ canonical approach were less positive. John Piper, then a professor at Bethel College, points out two major problems with the “canon criticism” of Childs and Sheppard in responding to the latter’s 1974 essay.⁴⁴ First of all, he raises the problem of authority. The canonical status of Scripture and its resultant divine authority are grounded in the confession and beneficial use of Scripture by the community of faith rather than in any objective criteria, such as its contents or origin, thus relying on “arbitrary human presuppositions or ecclesiastical affirmations.”⁴⁵ Second, he notes the problem of interpretation. In condemning both the historical-critical and historical-grammatical methods for seeking to reconstruct the intention of historical authors “*behind the text*,” thereby “decanonizing it,” Sheppard fails to acknowledge that only the latter limits itself to the present canonical text (which Sheppard touts). Furthermore, this criticism ignores the fact that one can legitimately determine the meaning of the canonical text only by attending to historical and grammatical details, such as the denotation and connotation of a specific Greek word in the first century. In abandoning the human author’s (or redactor’s) intention in favor of the intentions of a narrative, a canonical shape, or God, they also are abandoning “the historical particularity of divine revelation,” which has been faithfully preserved in Scripture by the Holy

40 Ibid., 108–09.

41 T. Letis, “Brevard Childs and the Protestant Dogmaticians: A Window to a New Paradigm of Biblical Interpretation,” *Churchman* 105 (1991): 261–77.

42 F. A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (New York: Crossway, 1984). Letis spends most of the essay introducing the problem before explaining briefly why Childs’ proposal offers a solution.

43 Letis, “Brevard Childs,” 271–72.

44 J. Piper, “Authority and Meaning of the Christian Canon: A Response to Gerald Sheppard on Canon Criticism,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19 (1976): 87–96. Piper is responding in his essay to Sheppard’s “Canon Criticism: The Proposal of Brevard Childs and an Assessment for Evangelical Hermeneutics.”

45 Piper, “Authority and Meaning,” 91.

Spirit, in favor of a “canonical shape” as the unique “place where God *now* speaks to man” through the Spirit.⁴⁶

In assessing canonical criticism, John Oswalt acknowledges from the beginning that his is an unapologetically conservative viewpoint.⁴⁷ Oswalt considers the initial enthusiastic greeting given to these proposals by conservatives as premature for several reasons. First of all, the approach is based on the conclusions of two centuries of historical-critical analysis of Scripture. Second, it shifts the locus of inspiration from the author to the believing community that wrestled with issues and reshaped traditions for centuries before “getting it right.” Third, (biblical) theology is removed from its historical context. According to Childs, the book of Exodus is to be received as theological revelation, even though its canonical portrayal of Moses’ actions is fictional.

It is this “separation of fact and meaning” that most disturbs Oswalt, who sees no rationale for equating a “traditional narrative” or even a “witness to revelation” (Childs’ expressions) with a “revealed word from God” (Oswalt’s expression).⁴⁸ He also questions whether one can interpret a text correctly on the basis of its literary (or canonical) context alone without reference to any historical context (as Childs claims regarding Isaiah 40–66). Despite these weighty criticisms, Oswalt concludes his essay by offering an example of the ways in which “some of the elements of this approach might be incorporated into Biblical study.”⁴⁹

Dale Brueggemann describes Childs’ canon criticism as “post-critical naïveté.”⁵⁰ He draws on Paul Ricoeur’s three-step hermeneutic (the moment of naïve understanding, the critical moment, and the post-critical moment) and assigns Childs’ approach to this third “moment.”⁵¹ Brueggemann concedes that some fundamentalists may adopt it, “simply reading in a few of their own theological positions and baptizing it as the reigning conservative method,” as Barr fears: “This may be so, but it should not happen.”⁵² His dissatisfaction with Childs is primarily hermeneutical. First, his approach suggests that “no one may ever have meant what the text means.” Second, the canonical shape might include “some texts that make no sense” in their final form. Third, Child’s “plain sense” criterion

46 Ibid., 94.

47 J. N. Oswalt, “Canonical Criticism: A Review from a Conservative Viewpoint,” *JETS* 30 (1987): 317–25.

48 Ibid., 320.

49 Ibid., 322. He notes in particular canonical criticism’s attention to the “literary wholeness” of a book and the significance of how books and collections of books are arranged (325). He uses Isaiah for his examples, discussing the canonical function of chapters 24–27 and tracing the development of the theme of servanthood throughout the major sections of the book.

50 D. A. Brueggemann, “Brevard Childs’ Canon Criticism: An Example of Post-Critical Naïveté,” *JETS* 32 (1989): 311–26.

51 Cited in Brueggemann, “Brevard Childs’ Canon Criticism,” 312, from P. Ricoeur, “Preface to Bultmann,” in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. L. S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 58.

52 Brueggemann, “Brevard Childs’ Canon Criticism,” 313.

for disallowing some hermeneutical approaches could be employed *against* the community that “participated most actively in the canonical process,” calling into question the authority of their “canonical decisions.” Fourth, having discounted the historical context of the original writer/audience/redactors/readers, it is difficult to determine what “interpretive clues” the canonical shape is giving.⁵³

Brueggemann’s charge of “naiveté” concerns, in part, Childs’ reliance on the canonical process and, in Brueggemann’s words, his “trust in the believing community’s faithfulness to revelation,” rather than relying on God, the revealer, who superintended that process. That is, apart from “some other external authority,” what is the basis for authenticating or absolutizing just one community, one process, one canon, one shape, one text, and one meaning amidst considerable evidence of a prolonged period of fluidity and pluralism?⁵⁴ Childs admits that he is employing a Wittgensteinian “language game” (i.e., a conventionalist theory of meaning), reading “the O.T. from a rule-of-faith called canon,”⁵⁵ thus finding unity amidst the diversity of Scripture because he confesses that unity. According to Brueggemann, however, Childs’ “emphasis upon an autonomous text is a sort of post-critical Biblicism,” with the canon reduced to “a heuristic model for opening up truth,” speaking with divine authority only “when we read it as if it were the Word of God.”⁵⁶

The eminent theologian Carl Henry also offers “an evangelical appraisal” of what he terms “canonical theology.”⁵⁷ His learned and lengthy exposition of Childs’ major emphases, interspersed with evaluative comments, helpfully situates Childs’ positions over against “critical ‘orthodoxy’” on one side and “evangelical orthodoxy” on the other. Henry praises his critique of “the tyranny over biblical studies that historical criticism imposes through unwarranted assumptions” and his efforts to refocus “scholarly interest on a normative canonical text as being the authoritative content and context for Christian theology” as “a monumental achievement.”⁵⁸

His concluding criticisms, primarily theological in orientation, however,

53 Ibid., 314–17.

54 Ibid., 318–20.

55 Childs, “Response to Reviewers,” 52.

56 Brueggeman, “Brevard Childs’ Canon Criticism,” 326. J. Dickson Brown, “Barton, Brooks, and Childs: A Comparison of the New Criticism and Canonical Criticism,” *JETS* 36 (1993): 481–89, compares Childs’ practice of textual autonomy with that of new criticism, concluding, rather questionably, that Childs practices it “out of necessity,” while new critics do so by “conscious choice” (488). Brown also claims that Childs is equally interested in both redactional intent and authorial intent; his critics would agree: Childs is equally interested in neither. The primary purpose of Brown’s essay, however, is to refute John Barton’s claim (*Reading the Old Testament* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984], 154) that Childs’ approach is very close to that of the new critics. Childs’ commitment to “intentionalism” is, at best, ambiguous.

57 C. F. H. Henry, “Canonical Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal,” *Scottish Bulletin of Theology* 8 (1990): 76–108.

58 Ibid., 107.

indicate that, overall, he cannot embrace Childs' project. First, it subordinates the Bible to the church, downplaying its "prophetic-apostolic sources." Second, Childs' repudiation of propositional revelation and his failure to ground biblical authority in supernatural revelation provide an insufficient reflection of the biblical claims (e.g., "that God routinely spoke to the prophets in sentences") and "warrant for scriptural authority." Third, his rejection of authorial intention and minimizing of the importance of apostolicity in canon-formation results in an "inferior view of divine inspiration." Fourth, he minimizes "the scriptural emphasis that apart from the historicity of biblical core events the Christian faith collapses." Fifth, he fails to affirm "the objective cognitive truth of Scripture."⁵⁹

More recently, Iain Provan has identified a major weakness of Childs' approach that goes beyond parochial evangelical concerns.⁶⁰ In Provan's opinion, despite Childs' much-noted criticisms of the theological aridness of the historical-critical enterprise, he is surprisingly committed to the objectivity and "assured results" of historical criticism as the "givens" to which the canonical approach must respond rather than the scholarly hypotheses that one can take or leave. In the process, Childs largely ignores more than two decades of extensive biblical research, not merely by evangelicals but also by the advocates of a literary approach. In Provan's view, this approach has seriously undermined historical criticism's monolithic claims regarding the composite nature of biblical texts. He claims that, "Childs describes himself as setting out to reconcile two sovereign nations. . . . At the same time, unacknowledged by Childs, *agents provocateurs* from different parts of the world are gradually persuading the community at large that 'nation B's' pretensions to sovereign status are just that—pretensions."⁶¹ Thus, Childs' "canonical readings" often are largely determined by his practice of beginning with historical-critical conclusions rather than beginning with the canonical text in its final form. Furthermore, Childs underestimates the extent to which diverse intertextual links indicate the early development of a "canonical consciousness" long before the community of faith put the finishing touches on the final form of the text, thereby reducing the degree of discontinuity between its earlier forms and its canonical form. Overall, Provan is more optimistic about the potential of Childs' canonical approach for having an impact on the Church than for changing the thinking of the Academy.

59 Ibid., 107–08, also 97–100.

60 I. Provan, "Canons to the Left of Him: Brevard Childs, his Critics, and the Future of Old Testament Theology," *SJT* 50 (1997): 1–38. In this wide-ranging essay, Provan also identifies shifts in Childs' thinking that are reflected in his *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) and interacts with other scholars' assessments of Childs. Like Carl Henry, he notes points of both agreement and disagreement with Childs; he gives a similar evaluation of Childs in "The Historical Books of the Old Testament," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. J. Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 206–09.

61 Provan, "Canons to the Left," 28.

*More comprehensive assessments.*⁶² The provocative nature of Childs' proposals, along with his prodigious literary output as he developed these proposals in the course of a lifetime of scholarship, have prompted a number of more comprehensive treatments of his work in the form of published and unpublished master's theses and dissertations, including some by evangelicals. To attempt to summarize several of them in a paragraph is to oversimplify their nuanced presentations and evaluations of various aspects of Childs' canonical approach. What is most interesting to note here are their individual attempts to remove the perceived weaknesses of the approach by adding something to it.

Some of Paul Noble's suggestions for revision point in a clearly "evangelical" direction.⁶³ He recommends a more eclectic approach, studying a text on the "most fruitful" level rather than simply defaulting to a final form that, in some cases, is obscure and confused. More importantly, according to Noble, Childs' approach requires a doctrine of "biblical inspiration," a *formal* (but not a *material*) model that "the biblical canon be construed as analogous to the 'collected works' of a single author," that is, the divine author whose intentions legitimate a hermeneutic that seeks to "make the best sense of the canonical text taken as a whole," regardless of what the human author of any individual text *intended*.⁶⁴ He also calls for a closer integration between faith and reason, an objectivist hermeneutics, and less reticence to affirm "eternal truths" or to acknowledge the proper place of "historical referentiality."⁶⁵

Another broader assessment of Childs' approach is incorporated into Charles Scalise's programmatic monograph on "theological hermeneutics."⁶⁶ Scalise proposes "several modifications, with the intention of enhancing his

62 It is unclear whether each of the following authors has an "evangelical affiliation," as defined above, although Charles Scalise currently teaches at Fuller Theological Seminary in Seattle. This lack of clarity led me to omit the monograph of Mark G. Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis? The Impact of the Canonical Approach on Old Testament Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) from this summary.

63 P. R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). See especially ch. 12: "A Critical Reconstruction of Childs' Programme." It is unclear whether Noble personally endorses these changes or simply claims that they are necessary in order to base a "viable biblical-theological programme" on Childs' work (328).

64 Ibid., 341, 344.

65 Noble concludes by listing the eight principle elements of "a revised canonical hermeneutics," which would achieve nearly all of Childs' major goals (369), most of which have been touched upon above. Childs clearly did not move in the direction of Noble's proposal.

66 C. J. Scalise, *Hermeneutics as Theological Prolegomena: A Canonical Approach*, Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics 8 (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1994). Scalise's book, which was based on his Southern Baptist Theological Seminary dissertation, "Canonical Hermeneutics: The Theological Basis and Implications of the Thought of Brevard S. Childs," (1987), was published in a more popular form as *From Scripture to Theology: A Canonical Journey into Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996). See also his "Canonical Hermeneutics: Childs and Barth," *SJT* 47 (1994): 61-88.

[Childs'] approach for the task of theological prolegomena."⁶⁷ First, take a more flexible approach to the boundaries of the canon, especially with regard to the deuterocanonical books. Second, revise Childs' view of tradition (as in tradition criticism) in the direction of Gadamer's more dynamic "dialogical model of tradition," which encompasses both the pre-history of a text and its ongoing appropriation as a living tradition within faith communities up to the present. Third, add precision to Childs' notion of canonical intentionality by drawing on Ricoeur's theory of reading, which distinguishes different levels of language; mapped onto Childs' approach, Ricoeur's categories allow one to speak of "canonical intentionality" (parallel to Ricoeur's "mimetic view of historical intentionality") without referring to the intentions of a specific author or editor. Fourth, include the newer sociological and literary methods of interpretation, thereby elevating the importance of human testimony to divine truth (i.e., all truth is God's truth and should be welcomed). The specific recommendations that Scalise considers to be essential if canonical hermeneutics is to contribute significantly "to the task of shaping a postcritical evangelical theology"⁶⁸ present a striking contrast to those suggested by Paul Noble.

The most recent monograph-length assessment of Childs is by William Lyons.⁶⁹ Lyons rejects Noble's objectivist reconstruction of Childs, opting for a non-foundational reconstruction. Rather than drawing on Wittgenstein, Gadamer, and Ricoeur in doing this, as Scalise does, he turns to the work of Stanley Fish. In Lyons' opinion, Fish's view of the role of the "interpretive community" helps to reframe Childs' understanding of the community of faith, which does not simply read the biblical text but chooses to read it *as Scripture*. Lyons also disagrees with Childs' position on the place of "extra-textual historical knowledge" in interpreting the canonical text (i.e., whether incorporating it will illuminate or skew one's reading). Whereas Childs seeks to restrict the interpretive use of such knowledge to that which is presupposed by the final form of the text, Lyons wants this to be determined by "the effect of that exegesis upon those who encounter it."⁷⁰ Lyons views "the canonical text as a thin text that may be radically altered by illumination, whatever its source, rather than as the single coherent thick text that Childs presumes to exist." Childs underestimates the significance of the interpreter's context for interpretation, and one must concede that there is "no single canonical meaning of the Bible."⁷¹

67 Scalise, *Hermeneutics*, 16. These modifications are set forth on pages 64–74 and in *From Scripture to Theology*, 59–66.

68 Scalise, *Hermeneutics*, 74.

69 W. J. Lyons, *Canon and Exegesis: Canonical Praxis and the Sodom Narrative*, JSOTSup 352 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

70 *Ibid.*, 263.

71 *Ibid.*, 264, 272. In a subsequent essay, "A Man of Honour, A Man of Strength, A Man of Will? A Canonical Approach to Psalm 137," *Didaskalia* 16 (2005), Lyons declares the "final form" to be "a creative and liberating force for an exegete" (43), since he finds in Childs' attention to the history of exegesis a warrant for allowing "any canonical exegete to attempt to incorporate from any illumination that seems appropri-

In 1987, John Oswalt noted that there is “no real agreement as to the exact ways in which canonical criticism should function”; instead, it seemed to Oswalt to be “every man for himself,” as with other critical methods.⁷² As the preceding survey of the evaluation of Brevard Childs’ work has demonstrated, Oswalt’s claim is probably equally valid today, despite the publication during the intervening two decades of thousands of additional pages by Childs and others in describing, assessing, and illustrating the method. Paralleling the wide range of (often mutually-exclusive) recommendations for modifying or reconstructing Childs’ canonical approach is the wide variety of ways in which scholars have employed it in carrying out the theological and exegetical task.

3. THE IMPACT AND APPROPRIATION OF BREVARD CHILDS’ CANONICAL APPROACH⁷³

Old Testament theology. In a recent survey of the discipline of OT theology, Elmer Martens notes two new approaches that have risen to prominence during the past three decades.⁷⁴ The more prominent of these is the canonical, used, most notably, by Rolf Rendtorff and by evangelicals William Dumbrell, John Sailhamer, Paul House, Stephen Dempster, and Bruce Waltke.⁷⁵ Given that Childs proposed in his *Biblical Theology in Crisis* a new model for doing biblical theology that takes its canonical context seriously, it appears that the seed that he planted in 1970 began to bear fruit a quarter of a century later. Martens notes five advantages of a canonical approach to OT theology: it provides a structural grid, avoids debates about historical issues such as the formation of biblical books,

ate and let others decide how far the attempt has succeeded” (46).

72 Oswalt, “Canonical Criticism,” 318.

73 In this section, as in the preceding one, I have been guided in my selection by the institutional affiliation of the scholar, as well as by the stated theological orientation of the journal or publisher.

74 E. Martens, “Old Testament Theology Since Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.,” *JETS* 50 (2007): 673–91.

75 R. Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2005; German ed. 1999, 2001); in chronological order: W. J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988; 2nd ed., 2002); J. H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); P. R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998); S. G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003); B. K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). According to Martens, Sailhamer currently is writing a full-length OT theology. In the final chapter of his *Introduction to OT Theology*, he advocates a text-centered, canonical, confessional, diachronic approach. Sailhamer is the most prominent proponent of a canonical approach among conservative evangelicals. The other newer approach noted by Martens is “story,” used most notably by John Goldingay. For a discussion of several additional scholars whose published OT theologies have a canonical orientation, see R. L. Schultz, “What is ‘Canonical’ about a Canonical OT Theology? Genesis as a Case Study of Recent OT Proposals,” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. S. Hafemann (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002) 84–96.

“allows a somewhat innovative configuration of exposition around a common theme,” more easily incorporates wisdom materials, and facilitates an easy connection with the New Testament.⁷⁶

It is questionable, however, whether any of these five features is inherently related to a canonical approach: with regard to the first, Childs’ own canonical OT theology evidences no such “structural grid,” being organized thematically rather than following the canonical order of the OT books. Nor is there a consensus regarding this order: in Dempster’s canon of the Latter Prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel precede Isaiah, and in the Writings, Ruth precedes Psalms. Regarding the second advantage, on the one hand, any OT theologian who chooses to do so (such as Walther Eichrodt) can avoid historical-compositional debates. On the other hand, Sailhamer chooses to incorporate “composition criticism” and a “canonicler” (i.e., redaction on the macro-level) into his method; meanwhile, Waltke summarizes the Latter Prophets in a posited chronological order, distinguishing a First, Second, and Third Isaiah and a First and Second Zechariah, and making no reference to the Book of the Twelve, a decidedly *uncanonical* approach. Regarding the third, House’s “innovative” exposition simply involves combining a theological center (i.e., “The God who...”) ⁷⁷ with a book-by-book approach, which is potentially as reductionistic as other ways of developing such a center. Regarding the fourth, a book-by-book approach necessarily will include a theological treatment of the wisdom books but is no guarantee that it will be rich or proportional. For example, Dempster allots slightly more than two pages to Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon in a two-hundred page OT theology.⁷⁸ Finally, regarding the sixth, a canonical approach may allow for a natural connection to the NT. In practice, however, this can take widely varying forms: Waltke frequently makes reference to the NT, House occasionally, Dumbrell seldom, and Dempster only on four pages.

In sum, it remains unclear whether any of these four scholars is doing OT theology “in a canonical context” as Childs understands it. Rather, the recent evangelical contributions of Dempster and Waltke largely confirm my earlier analysis of characteristic features of canonical approaches to OT theology.⁷⁹ First, a canonical approach focuses on the final form of the individual books, often in their Hebrew canonical order. Second, it is based on the “canonical” presentation of Israelite history rather than on a critical reconstruction. Third, it treats OT theology as normative for us today. Fourth, it downplays theological tensions

76 Martens, “OT Theology,” 677.

77 Using present tense verbs, including “is” with adjectives. Compare Goldingay’s “God -ed” with past tense verbs, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003).

78 Waltke similarly shortchanges the Prophets in giving them only 45 pages and summarizing their “message” in 17, in striking contrast to von Rad’s thorough treatment of the Prophets. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, in contrast, devotes 28 pages to Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon and 144 pages to the Prophets (including Daniel).

79 † Schultz, “What is ‘Canonical,’” 96.

and emphasizes unifying features. Fifth, although OT theology is a Christian discipline (since an OT implies an NT), a canonical approach seeks to present the unique voice of the OT's witness to faith. In comparison with Childs, these evangelical contributions also give more attention to literary features of the OT.⁸⁰ It will be interesting to note how future OT theologies by evangelicals will develop the canonical model differently from their predecessors and from Childs.

Charles Scobie's massive biblical theology, *The Ways of Our God*, which he explicitly describes as "canonical,"⁸¹ is closer to the approach to biblical theology that Childs envisions than any of the OT theologies just discussed. According to Scobie, a canonical biblical theology has seven distinguishing characteristics: It is limited to the canon of Christian Scripture; it is based on both the Old and New Testaments, on the content of the Christian canon, on the structure of the Christian canon, on the text of the Christian canon, and primarily on the final form of the text; and it rejects a "canon within a canon."⁸²

In assessing Childs' proposal for doing biblical theology, Gordon McConville seeks to make a case for a canonical approach. In that biblical theology must wrestle with the "two-testament canon" and is constructed "in inner-canonical relationships," a canonical approach is actually indispensable. He asserts, however, that such an approach cannot "dispense with a historical dimension, because of the historical nature of the texts, and the impossibility of distinguishing ultimately between religion and theology."⁸³ In advocating a "plain or literal sense" approach to the text, Childs directs the Christian to read the Bible from Old to New rather than backward to the Old from the New, helping to assure that all parts of both testaments will be heard before asking how specific texts relate to the central subject of Scripture, Jesus Christ.

OT exegetical applications. Ever since Childs first introduced his canonical approach, OT scholars, including many evangelicals, have employed it in interpreting OT canonical sub-divisions, books, texts, and themes. In the process, they have discovered and demonstrated both the problems and the potential of adopting a canonical perspective, often subsequently recommending a slight hermeneutical tune-up to help the Childs' approach run more smoothly. In this section, a number of canonical interpretive works of varying lengths by evangelicals will

80 In fact, Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, prefers to describe his method as "a literary approach" (15). In referring to the OT as a "Text," however, rather than "texts," he is adopting a canonical approach. Similarly, Waltke, in *An OT Theology*, prefers to describe his as a "narrative theology" (ch. 4), although briefly explaining in the Preface that his approach is "canonical" (10) in that it integrates the messages of the OT with those of the NT.

81 C. H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). Scobie discusses seven characteristics of a canonical theology on 49–76.

82 J. G. McConville, "Biblical Theology: Canon and Plain Sense (Finlayson Memorial Lecture 2001)," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 19 (2001): 134–57.

83 McConville, "Biblical Theology," 155.

be summarized in canonical rather than in chronological order.⁸⁴

Torah. The holistic approach to the Pentateuch taken by John Sailhamer, like those of David Clines and Thomas Mann (PhD from Yale),⁸⁵ could be viewed as canonical in some sense, particularly in his emphasis on the final form. None of these scholars, however, notes Childs as a significant influence on the development of his approach (even the emphasis on the final form), which is clearly more literary than canonical. Two of Sailhamer's essays discussing the compositional structure of the Pentateuch are more canonical in approach.⁸⁶ He notes the eschatological orientation of the Pentateuch ("in days to come": Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 31:29), as well as its repeated emphasis on faith. In the narrative contrast between Abraham (who, before the law, fulfilled the law through faith, Gen. 26:5) and Moses (who, under the law, disobeyed through lack of faith, Num. 20:12) and the selective presentation of the law as God's demands on Israel, he sees a theological prioritization of faith coupled with an assertion of the necessity of internalizing the law.

Lyons' previously-summarized volume includes a new "canonical interpretation" of the Sodom narrative (Gen. 18–19) that takes up three of its six chapters.⁸⁷ Lyons seeks to resolve a tension in this text between an individualistic and a corporate—as well as between a patriarchal and an egalitarian—understanding of divine justice, concluding that Lot is ultimately saved solely because he is a relative of Abraham. According to Lyons, God refuses to give Abraham a clear answer to his question, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (18:25), and thus the story fails to resolve the issue. This leaves the issue open for subsequent canonical investigation, which remains similarly inconclusive. With such an understanding gleaned from various texts throughout the canon, one can read the canonical text "backwards," leading to the decision to sustain rather than to seek to resolve the tension.⁸⁸

Prophets. Two early, unpublished dissertations on the Book of the Twelve with a canonical emphasis helped to bring about a shift from treating each of the Minor Prophets as a separate book to focusing on the unifying features of the

84 Gerald Sheppard's Yale dissertation, published as *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament*, BZAW 151 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), is one of the earliest explorations of "canon conscious" redactional activity.

85 D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1978); T. W. Mann, *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988); J. H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

86 J. Sailhamer, "The Canonical Approach to the Old Testament: Its Effect on Understanding Prophecy," *JETS* 30 (1987): 307–15; "The Mosaic Law and the Theology of the Pentateuch," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 241–61.

87 Lyons, *Canon and Exegesis*.

88 In his canonical approach to the imprecatory Psalm 137 ("A Man of Honour," 64–65), Lyons also draws on what he terms "the canon's problematic notion(s) of justice," concluding that if "God is truly light, however, the practice of divine justice which is currently so opaque in the canon must one day be made transparent to all."

larger collection, giving rise to a study group within the Society of Biblical Literature that continues today.⁸⁹ Similarly, Elmer Dyck's unpublished dissertation focused on Jonah's function as one of "the Twelve," an approach which, at the time, was at odds with typical critical treatments of Jonah.⁹⁰ In a summary essay, he concludes that the process of collection was prolonged and conscious, influenced by Judah's political and religious life and functionally tied to "nationalist revival." Accordingly, each of the individual books, including Jonah, contributed to this larger function.⁹¹

More recently, Michael O'Neal has applied the canonical approach to the book of Habakkuk.⁹² Although his thorough exegesis of this book confirms a number of Childs' exegetical and theological conclusions as stated in his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, O'Neal recommends his approach only "with reservation."⁹³ O'Neal argues that the book of Habakkuk has the framework of an individual lament (contra Childs, who identifies an autobiographical framework) and that the final form was most strongly influenced by the cult (Childs assigns this cultic influence to an earlier compositional stage). O'Neal ultimately offers theological rather than historical-critical explanations for several of the observed tensions in the book.

Writings. Although many variant orders of the books belonging to the Hebrew *Kethubim* exist,⁹⁴ a number of publications attempt to derive theological implications from a particular canonical order.⁹⁵ Recently, Julius Steinberg has addressed this question in a monograph-length study, clearly stating his thesis in its opening sentence: "The macrostructure of the Hebrew biblical canon is her-

89 D. A. Schneider, "Unity of the Book of the Twelve" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1979); A. Y. Lee, "Canonical Unity of the Minor Prophets" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1985).

90 E. Dyck, "Canonical Hermeneutics and the Book of Jonah" (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1986). Dyck summarizes his research in "Jonah Among the Prophets: A Study in Canonical Context," *JETS* 33 (1990): 63–73.

91 Dyck, "Jonah Among the Prophets," 69–70.

92 G. M. O'Neal, *Interpreting Habakkuk as Scripture: An Application of the Canonical Approach of Breward S. Childs*, Studies in Biblical Literature 9 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007). This was O'Neal's dissertation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

93 Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 451–55. According to O'Neal (*Interpreting Habakkuk*, 151–53), Childs' text-critical bias toward the Masoretic Text is inadequate in practice, his strong critique of historical-critical scholarship ignores those scholars who address the book's shape and message, and Childs fails to demonstrate that the book contains materials from vastly different historical periods and gives insufficient attention to the book's place within the Twelve. Overall, however, Childs' method has opened up some interpretive possibilities for O'Neal.

94 See R. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 452–64.

95 See, for example, Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, chs. 7–8; also his "An Extraordinary Fact: Torah and Temple and the Contours of the Hebrew Canon," *Tyndale Bulletin* 48 (1997): 23–53, 191–218.

meneutically significant.”⁹⁶ Steinberg therefore proposes a “structural-canonical” method. After discussing the structure and message of the individual books at length, he then considers these books as a “literary macro-unit” (or “unity,” *Makroeinheit*), following their order in Baba Batra 14b.⁹⁷

Gerald Wilson carries out a detailed study of the editing of the Hebrew Psalter and its theological significance in his Yale dissertation, further developing his views in a number of subsequent publications.⁹⁸ Wilson concludes his monograph with a chapter on “the final ‘shape’ of the canonical collection,” which for him clearly has theological implications. The Psalter’s “sapiential framework” redirects the community’s response to the anguish of exile to a renewed reliance on Yahweh as Israel’s true King and on the guidance of his Torah. More broadly, the final form legitimates the continued use of these ancient psalms by the worshipping community of faith, as well as its appropriation by individuals “as models of personal access to God in prayer.” It also encourages meditation and study of the Psalter as a whole as a “life and death” enterprise, since this canonical shaping caused “these very human words *to* God . . . to become God’s word *to us*.”⁹⁹

Bruce Waltke’s “canonical process approach” to the Psalms moves in a very different direction.¹⁰⁰ Waltke notes four stages of the canonical process: the original poet, earlier First Temple collections, the final Second Temple OT canon, and the full biblical canon. He argues that, in the course of these stages, the “meaning” of (most) psalms shifted from referring to Israel’s king as speaker and representative of the people to the future messianic king and, finally, to Jesus Christ. He concludes that “the Psalms are ultimately the prayers of Jesus Christ, Son of God,” which we, as sons of God, also “can rightly pray.”¹⁰¹

4. THE FUTURE OF THE CANONICAL APPROACH

In the preceding sections I have tried to portray the extensive and widely-divergent ways in which Brevard Childs’ canonical approach has been assessed and appropriated in evangelical scholarship during the past three decades, largely without evaluating these assessments. Judging by the publications reviewed, the overall evangelical reception has been more positive than negative, which is not

96 J. Steinberg, *Die Ketuvim—ihr Aufbau und ihre Botschaft*, Bonner biblische Beiträge 152 (Hamburg: Philo, 2006), 7, my translation. This work represents his dissertation submitted in 2004 to the evangelical Evangelisch-Theologischen Fakultät Leuven/Belgium.

97 *Ibid.*, 206–438 and 439–61, respectively.

98 G. H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, Society for Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 76 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985); most recently “The Structure of the Psalter,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. D. Firth and P. S. Johnston (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 229–46.

99 Wilson, “The Structure of the Psalter,” 244–46.

100 Waltke, “A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms” in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. J. S. and P. D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 3–18. Waltke acknowledges his indebtedness to Childs (7–9), while carefully distinguishing his approach, finding himself closer to Sanders in some respects.

101 *Ibid.*, 16.

surprising given Childs' strong critique of historical criticism and emphasis on the community of faith. Nearly every scholar who has discussed or utilized Childs' approach, however, has recommended one or more substantial revisions, some of which Childs would likely oppose strongly.

Now that we can look back on Childs' sustained efforts over the course of his academic career to encourage the Academy to read the Hebrew Bible as Scripture, what will be his lasting legacy in evangelical circles? As I have reviewed this literature, several issues came to mind. First, in his 1980 "Response to Reviewers," Brevard Childs expressed his hope that "the widespread, but simplistic, categorizing of biblical scholars into liberal and conservative camps could be overcome."¹⁰² Although one still occasionally witnesses ugly displays of disdain from the one camp and demonization from the other, in some respects many individuals within these particular camps have moved closer together. This has led to several significant cooperative efforts in which evangelicals and non-evangelicals are working closely together.

One example is the Scripture and Hermeneutics Seminar, headed by evangelical Craig Bartholomew but involving Christian scholars from a wide range of ecclesial affiliations and theological positions. Their decade-long project to "renew biblical interpretation" began with a conference in 1998. Childs attended the second consultation in 1999, also writing the preface to the first of eight resulting volumes that have been published by Zondervan. Fittingly, the 2005 consultation focused on "Reading the Bible canonically."¹⁰³ Childs' "legacy of inspiring theological exegesis" among both evangelicals and non-evangelicals is also secure,¹⁰⁴ his concerns helping to stimulate the rise and growth of the discipline known as "theological interpretation," which already has produced a major reference work, two commentary series, several volumes of collected essays, a monograph series, a journal, and a Society of Biblical Literature study group.

Second, Childs' canonical approach has helped evangelical scholars to shift their focus from apologetic defenses of historicity and traditional views of composition and authorship to theologically-rich analytical and synthetic exegetical work. Most notably, it has supplied them with a preferred and productive model for doing Old Testament and biblical theology, which stakes out a middle ground between multiplying mutually exclusive theologies on the one extreme and con-

102 Childs, "Response to Reviewers," 59.

103 The papers from the 2005 consultation were published in 2006 as *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, which includes essays on reading various OT books or subsections canonically by Gordon McConville, Stephen Dempster, Gordon Wenham, Tremper Longman III, and Robin Parry.

104 This is affirmed by Daniel J. Treier, "Theological Hermeneutics, Contemporary," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. K. J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 789–90. Here, one also could note Childs' indirect influence on Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), although Vanhoozer explicitly contrasts his approach with Childs (216–19). Would such an approach to Christian theology be proposed apart from Childs' work?

trived harmonization on the other and gives particular attention to the development of theological themes, the reinterpretation of biblical events, and intertextual relationships, especially quotations and allusions, across both testaments.

Third, despite the fact that Childs was unhappy with the guild's relatively quick transformation of his canonical approach into an interpretive method labeled "canonical criticism,"¹⁰⁵ this development has encouraged evangelicals to augment their traditional historical-grammatical method. Many of them have incorporated elements from a number of newer interpretive approaches, such as literary, social-scientific, and text-linguistic (which Childs did not embrace), in addition to the canonical, to create a richer eclectic interpretive method. To evangelicals who adopt a modified form of canonical criticism, Childs' repeated emphasis on the "final form" issues a challenge to consider seriously the hermeneutical significance of the shaping and shape (i.e., structure and order) of biblical texts and books.

Fourth, despite Barr's fears, Childs' somewhat ambivalent love/hate relationship with the historical-critical enterprise makes him a rather unreliable ally in conservative evangelicalism's ongoing critique of it. Furthermore, newer literary approaches supply evangelicals with more effective arguments against historical-critical conclusions that are viewed as undercutting the reliability and authority of biblical texts than Childs' argument that the historical-critical method renders texts "theologically mute."

Finally, since Childs offered numerous examples rather than giving detailed guidelines that prescribe how the interpreter properly moves from the canonical "shape" to the canonical "reading" or meaning,¹⁰⁶ it is unlikely that any consensus will emerge regarding the *correct* (rather than a *plausible*) canonical interpretation of a given text. Nevertheless, the canonical approach may help some evangelicals to move beyond a fixation on the original (human) author's intentions to achieve "thicker" textual readings. Some evangelicals will continue to wonder why Childs wrote so negatively concerning historical criticism, while others will wonder why he could never break free from his seemingly uncritical acceptance of its "assured results." Contrary to some of his critics, Childs maintained a place for authorial intent within his canonical approach and affirmed that historical references often were preserved in the canonical process, which reshaped texts to function as the Word of God for future generations.¹⁰⁷ Since evangelicals, like non-evangelicals, have widely differing conceptions of the proper or permissible weight to be given to the worlds *behind*, *in front of*, and *within* the text,¹⁰⁸ Childs' canonical concerns

105 This is exemplified by John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), which introduces it as the last of nine foundational "criticisms."

106 The closest Childs comes to giving such guidelines is in *The New Testament as Canon*, 48–53.

107 See Chapman, "Reclaiming Inspiration for the Bible," 176; and Seitz, "The Canonical Approach and Theological Interpretation," 63–65.

108 W. Randolph Tate organizes his *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997) around these three "worlds."

will be correspondingly more or less central to their interpretive work. Nevertheless, evangelical biblical interpretation has been permanently enriched because Brevard Childs succeeded in elevating "canon" from a list of authoritative books to a foundational hermeneutical context.

Richard Schultz is the Carl Armerding and Hudson T. Armerding Chair of Biblical Studies at Wheaton College.

BREVARD CHILDS AS CRITICAL AND FAITHFUL EXEGETE

Philip Sumpter

Brevard Childs died on June 23, 2007. In his memory, C. Seitz said, “I can think of no person who made a greater contribution to the work of unifying the Bible, theology and church life together in a very serious way, not in a flimsy or a pious way.”¹ This statement betrays the fact that these dimensions have indeed been torn apart in a significant way, that the challenge to the church is serious, and that the solution cannot be a simple escape into a golden era of pre-critical scholarship. This state of affairs is not new, however, as throughout its history, the church has faced challenges to the coherency and legitimacy of its proclamation. Many of the church’s responses have been inadequate; many have proved durable. Through its trials and errors, however, the church has held to its core confession that God, the creator of heaven and earth, has sent his Son to redeem his people, and he will guide them until the consummation of all things. Within this broad framework, or rule of faith (*regula fidei*), the church has struggled to hear the Word of God in obedience.

Given its foundational nature for the church as well as for Childs, this formula demands close attention if we are to get at the heart of Childs’ thought. The sequential nature of the various forms of this rule of faith (e.g., Irenaeus’ Creation – Incarnation – New Creation) expresses a story or “history” (*Geschichte, Historie*), of which the main characters are God, humanity, and creation. A detail of this story talks of God beginning to speak to a select, chosen people by means of a book, which, by virtue of this speaking, becomes for this people Scripture. The ongoing struggle to hear God’s Word in Scripture in conjunction with the Holy Spirit characterizes the existence of this people from a certain point in time.² This story is part of the genuine history of the church. As a genuine struggle, this tradition of ecclesial interpretation is marked by discontinuities and failure, as the forces of history, sociology, philosophy, and human sin have made their mark. Yet consonant with the promise of the Holy Spirit, the church has also made a consistent witness to the truth of God. Childs’ last published book before his death was an attempt to identify the basic features of these enduring theological concerns in the history of the church.³ These “family resemblances” do not function as “the last word” on such complex issues as the multiple senses of Scripture, the nature of biblical authority, or the Christological content of the Bible, but rather set the

1 See http://www.yale.edu/divinity/news/070625_news_childs.shtml.

2 See G. Ebeling, who speaks of church history as the exposition of scripture, in *Die Geschichtlichkeit der Kirche* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1954), 8.

3 B. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); hereafter cited as *Struggle*.

boundaries within which acceptable Christian interpretation can be made, outside of which is the threat of heresy.⁴

Childs has identified the following six constitutive features of traditional Christian exegesis:⁵ Scripture is authoritative, has a literal and a spiritual sense, consists of two testaments, is divinely and humanly authored, has a Christological content, and has a “dialectical” understanding of history. I shall use these six characteristics in this essay as a heuristic structure for presenting Childs’ own approach. The hope is that this form of presentation will also demonstrate that Childs himself belongs to the Christian story and, thus, may be seen as a genuine exegete of the one holy catholic and apostolic church.

1. THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

A basic characteristic of Christian exegesis has been its acknowledgement of the authority of scripture, but how this conviction is expressed and interpreted varies greatly. Widespread is the conviction that God is the author of the Bible’s Word. It contains the Word of truth calling for the “obedience of faith.”⁶

This basic theological stance regards the text as “witness.” The category is foundational to Childs’ approach and provides the key to understanding his response to the challenges of modernity within the framework of Christian faith. As “witness,” the Bible is not a closed self-referential universe but rather a vehicle pointing beyond itself to “what it is really all about,” i.e., the text’s true subject matter. The witnessed-to reality can be variously labeled as Scripture’s “substance” (*res*), “Word,” “God,” “Christ,” “the divine reality which has entered time and space,” “God’s one plan of redemption,” or “Gospel.” Whatever nomenclature this ultimate subject of the Bible receives, it is the life and sustenance of the church. The authority of Scripture, then, consists in its role as both witness to that truth and vehicle for future guidance in terms of that truth. Biblical authority is not so much an abstract “given,” an intrinsic property of the text, as a function of the relationship between the text, God, and community. Biblical authority concerns a real God and a real people who live in relationship throughout time. This relationship, however, is not static. It is presented in the Bible as a journey, in which God guides his people to the fullness of truth for the sake of his creation. This very real, ongoing relationship “outside” the text encompasses the process whereby the texts themselves are produced (from independent traditions to canonical Scripture). As such, “authority” from a Christian perspective entails a diachronic dimension.⁷

4 Ibid., 322.

5 Ibid., 299–324.

6 Ibid., 300.

7 This dynamic and relational concept of authority can be seen in the following statement: “The scriptures not only are inspired in their origin, but are continuously infused with the promise of divine illumination. Depending on its particular context, scripture can be described both as being the Word of God and becoming the Word of God.” See B. Childs, “Speech-act Theory and Biblical Interpretation,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58:4 (2005): 381.

The result of this peculiar relationship between God and his people via Scripture is that the text has acquired its own theological dynamic. The process of collecting, interpreting, and shaping the sacred traditions was primarily a theological one in which the sacred heritage was shaped in such a way that it would be able to function as authoritative Scripture for those who had not participated in the original events of revelation.⁸ It was a profoundly hermeneutical activity. An interpretive structure was given, contouring relationships between texts and setting the boundaries for later generations within which God's voice was to be heard.⁹ A "redactioned" or "ruled" reading of the texts, often characterized as "kerygmatic," "confessional," or "canonical,"¹⁰ was thus required by later generations in order to hear God's word for a new day. The closing of the canon fixed the shape of the text, focusing attention on the final form. After this point, commentary became the accepted means of interpreting Scripture for changing needs.¹¹

At the beginning of his career, Childs worked as a form critic, which meant that his primary concern was identifying the unique ways in which Israel responded to its tradition and proclaimed its message.¹² From this historical critical perspective, Childs made the following statement about the theological function of

8 B. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 60. Of course, Childs recognizes the presence of other factors in the shaping of the texts. However, for him, the primary factor was theological. The presence of this historical intentionality is central to the viability of his proposal. Thus, for example, "a historical critical theory of Deuteronomy which would construe the book as a pious fraud created for propaganda reasons to support the political aspirations of the Jerusalem priesthood would, if true, raise serious questions about a canonical interpretation which claimed that the book was shaped by predominantly religious concerns." See B. Childs, "Response to Reviewers of *Introduction to the OT as Scripture*," *JSOT* 16 (1980): 56. Jon Levenson also makes this clear: "Childs actually *requires* historical criticism in order to make his larger theological point." See J. Levenson, "Is Brueggemann Really a Pluralist?" *Harvard Theological Review* 93:3 (2000): 273.

9 See B. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 12: "One of the important aspects within the shaping process of the Old Testament is the manner by which different parts of the canon were increasingly interchanged to produce a new angle of vision on the tradition. . . . The canonical process thus built in a dimension of flexibility which encourages constantly fresh ways of actualizing the material." See also B. Childs, "The Old Testament as Scripture of the Church," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43 (1972): 709–22.

10 Childs, "Speech-act Theory and Biblical Interpretation," 383.

11 For an illustration of the unique capacity of the genre of commentary to engage Scripture, see B. Childs, "The Genre of the Biblical Commentary as Problem and Challenge," in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg*, ed. Moshe Greenberg, Mordechai Cogan, Barry L. Eichler, and Jeffrey H. Tigay (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 185–92.

12 See B. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 7: "By analyzing the various ways in which Israel reacted to her traditions a new perspective is opened into the historical and theological message of the prophet [Isaiah] which is sensitive to the tension, interaction, and resolution of elements which together constitute the full biblical witness."

Israel's traditions:

Israel's memory . . . serves a far more important role than merely providing illustrations from the past. It serves in making Israel noetically aware of a history which is ontologically a unity. There is only one redemptive history.¹³

This redemptive history finds its mature expression in Irenaeus' rule of faith (Creation – Incarnation – New Creation). This rule functions as a boundary within which Christian exegesis can take place. Yet the rule is not detached from the witness on which it is based, as the very hermeneutical shape given to the text also adumbrates in complex ways the full meaning of the relationship between YHWH and Israel. It would seem that for this reason Childs at times calls the canonical shape of the Bible itself a rule of faith.¹⁴

The theological reality of the relationship between God and his people and the unique role of Scripture in this relationship has left a material mark on the text of the Bible with concrete implications for today's exegete. Since the Enlightenment, it has become clear that one does not have to read the Bible according to its own perspective. It is possible to understand the Bible in history-of-religions categories. Yet despite the importance of such work (see section 2 below), the goal and procedure of such exegetical practice are different from an approach that would read the Bible as the Word of God to his people. Belonging to this people requires that one aligns oneself with the Bible's own perspective:

The biblical text must be studied in closest connection with the community of faith which treasured it. Obviously these texts can be studied from any number of other contexts and perspectives, but not as Sacred Scripture! The authority of the canon of Scripture is not a claim of objective truth apart from the community of faith but it is a commitment to a particular perspective from which the reality of God is viewed.¹⁵

13 B. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1961), 51. In one of Childs' earliest works, he analyzed the elements of continuity and discontinuity in Israel's view of reality in terms of "myth" and "eschatology," which the following quote nicely illustrates: "The prophetic hope of the new age was pictured in terms of God's former redemptive acts. However, the last events were now to fulfill the original purpose of the first. The return to the past signifies the continuity in the one will of God; the newness of the end indicates the full intensity of the light which at first shone only in dim reflection. The new of the *Endzeit* became the criterion for determining what was qualitatively new at the *Urzeit*." See B. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 81.

14 See Childs, "Speech-act Theory and Biblical Interpretation," 383: "The effect of this canonical shaping was that a framework was given, often called a rule-of-faith within which the material was interpreted by and for the church."

15 B. Childs, "The *Sensus Literalis* of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem," in *Beiträge zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70* (Geburtstag Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 92. For an early, "pre-canonical approach" formulation of this view, see Childs, *Myth and Reality*, 98: "That

The exegete as member of the congregation must face a hermeneutical decision *before* he reads the text: As a member of a historical people with a text that has been the unfolding word of God to them through time, how do I best situate myself to receive that message today? What is the authoritative context within which the message of the Bible takes shape? Given what has been said above about the peculiar function of this text within the context of God's eschatological purpose, Childs would argue the text's final form is authoritative.¹⁶

At this juncture, it is important to raise an important functional distinction between "scripture" and "canon." Whereas both these categories refer to the authoritative collection of sacred writings as the vehicle for communicating the will of God, the term Scripture refers above all to the divine authority of these writings. Canon, on the other hand, refers to the scope of the collection.¹⁷ This distinction is important for understanding the significance of the fluidity of the Christian canon, especially respecting the tension between the narrow (Jewish) and larger (Greek) forms of the Old Testament corpus. Historically speaking, this fluidity in scope (i.e., the question of which canon) has never played a decisive role in challenging the concept of the authority of Scripture *per se* (i.e., that core texts do indeed contain the word of God) for the Christian faith. Although the question of scope and the role of translations is an issue, it is important not to overestimate the scale of the problem. It is not the case that the church has functioned without a scripture or in deep confusion. Rather, as Childs states, "the implication to be drawn is exactly the reverse. In spite of areas of disagreement [concerning a few books on the periphery], the Bible in its various forms has continued to function

which is ultimate in the Old Testament has been inextricably tied to the forms of Israel's daily life, including her history, tradition, institutions, thought-patterns, and language. . . . We cannot penetrate 'behind' Israel to find reality." See also *ibid.*, 99: "Problems in Biblical theology stem from attempts to relate reality to something other than the concrete experience of Israel. Usually this means finding reality in the *ideas* of Israel or in some *concept* of history into which certain aspects of Israel's life can be fitted."

16 Childs believes that aligning oneself with the canonical perspective of the text is not only necessary for theological interpretation, but also for general apprehension of the "worldview" of the historical biblical authors and tradents of tradition. In his overview of recent studies on "canon," Childs questions whether the history-of-religions categories deployed by scholars such as J. J. Collins, J. Blenkinsopp, and P. Davies "will prove more objective and unbiased than the theological ones being replaced. Can such an approach generate enough empathy for interpreting religious texts where the perspective is often radically alien to the entire Western mentality?" (38). He notes that such anthropocentric, sociological interpretations are oblique angles of reading, in essential contradiction to the Old Testament's own self-understanding (cf. Deut. 31:9–13). Indeed, according to the Old Testament pattern, "the formation of a written corpus was theocentric in orientation. It identified the will of God for successive generations so that they might live in accordance with the enduring commands of God expressed in Torah. It is not simply a flexible paradigm without an established content" (39). See B. Childs, "The Canon in Recent Biblical Studies: Reflections on an Era" in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. C. Bartholomew, S. Hahn, R. Parry, C. Seitz, and A. Wolters (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 33–57.

17 Childs, "Speech-act Theory and Biblical Interpretation," 381.

as an authoritative norm for the church throughout its history.”¹⁸ The tensions that arose in the Reformation were dogmatic in nature and were concerned with the relation of biblical authority to later church tradition, not with the question of biblical authority *per se*.¹⁹

A final clarification concerning Childs’ use of the terminology of “substance” and “ontological unity” is in order, as these words have acquired associations through usage which most biblical scholars have attempted to eschew. Classically, the philosophical concept of “substance” denotes the essence of a thing in distinction from its accidents and its qualities. In traditional Western ontology an analogy of being was sought between human and divine reality which could be discerned to some degree by means of reason. As such, objections may be raised that Childs’ concern with biblical reality will end up with a static deposit, a “ground of being,” or an abstraction of timeless ideals.

Childs’ understanding, however, is informed by the biblical witness. The dynamic nature of the divine reality has already been indicated by the description of the *regula fidei* as narrative or the depiction of God’s activity as incarnational. When talking of “ontology,” it is crucial that the reality of God be understood as primary. According to the Bible,

the reality of God . . . has no true being apart from communion, first within God’s self, and secondly with his creation. God is one whose being is in loving which is grounded in a freely given commitment toward humanity and this relationship is constitutive of his being.²⁰

2. THE LITERAL AND SPIRITUAL SENSES OF SCRIPTURE

In section 1 we established that a theological approach to Scripture must first classify the text as a “witness” to divine truth. This introduces a distinction between the mere verbal sense of the individual texts and the reality to which they give partial access. When the verbal sense of the text is provisionally relabeled the “literal sense” (see the *sensus literalis/originalis* discussion below) and the ultimate referent the “spiritual sense,” we can see the continuity of Childs’ approach with traditional Christian exegesis. Theological reflection must ultimately be on the text’s subject matter so that the basic thrust of theological interpretation is from the literal to the spiritual. This move also gives the concept of allegory a new currency, as long as allegory is understood to be a means of moving to the text’s ultimate subject matter while respecting the literal sense of text itself (i.e.,

18 B. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (London: SCM, 1992), 66.

19 Cf. Childs, *Struggle*, 301. As with most issues misunderstood by Childs’ later critics, this point was made early on: “The fundamental theological issue at stake is not the extent of the canon, which has remained in some flux within Christianity, but the claim for a normative body of tradition contained in a set of books.” See B. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 98. For a discussion of the question of which canon, see section 3; for the question of which text (MT or LXX), see section 4b (while taking into account the arguments of section 2!).

20 Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 82.

its “integrity” or its “own voice”—what Seitz calls its “per se witness”²¹).

The question of the existence of a “spiritual” dimension to the text has never been an issue in the church. (Its roots go back to the New Testament; cf. John 3:14, Matt. 16:4, 1 Cor. 9:9, Rom. 3:31ff.)²² Rather, the issue has been the nature of the relationship between the literal and spiritual dimensions. Childs’ own proposal draws on the logic of “faith seeking knowledge.” In other words, the desire to understand the divine reality requires a starting point from within a position of faith: Christians confess “Christ [while] struggling to understand the nature and will of the One who has already been revealed as Lord.”²³ This entails what in general hermeneutics is called the “hermeneutical circle.” Childs also draws on Dilthey’s distinction between “*erklären*” (explanation) and “*verstehen*” (understanding)²⁴ in order to help him explain the dialectical move from the particular (the literal sense) to the general (the spiritual sense) and back again. That is, one

comes to exegesis already with certain theological [i.e., “spiritual”] assumptions and the task of good exegesis is to penetrate so deeply into the biblical text [i.e., in its literal sense] that even these assumptions are called into question, are tested and revised by the subject matter itself.²⁵

In more theological terms, the basic thrust of Christian exegesis can be described as a move from “the partial grasp of fragmentary reality found in both testaments to the full reality which the Christian church confesses to have found in Jesus Christ, in the combined witness of the two testaments.”²⁶

This “outward” thrust, however, does not obviate the need for the second move, in which the particular text is re-heard in light of the full reality of God in Jesus Christ. Childs claims that biblical language has the ability

to resonate in a new and creative fashion when read from the vantage point of a fuller understanding of Christian truth. Such a reading is not intended to threaten the *sensus literalis* of the text, but to extend through figuration a reality which has only been partially heard. It is for this reason that allegory or typology, when properly understood and practised, remains an essential part of Christian interpretation and reflects a different understanding of how biblical reality is rendered than, say, midrash

21 C. Seitz, *Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1998). Childs approvingly cites A. Lowth: “allegory, used in its broadest sense, is constitutive of Christian interpretation as a means of discerning the mystery of Christ.” See A. Lowth, *Discerning the Mystery* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 96–131; cited in Childs, *Struggle*, 302.

22 Childs, *Struggle*, 302.

23 Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 86.

24 *Ibid.*, 83.

25 B. Childs, “Does the Old Testament Witness to Jesus Christ?” in *Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche*, ed. Å. Jostein, S. Hafemann, H. Otfried, and F. Gerlinde (Göttingen: Vanderhoek & Ruprecht, 1997), 60.

26 Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 85.

does within Judaism.²⁷

The central role of the literal or plain sense as witness thus obliges the Christian exegete to preserve the text's integrity, which means that there must be a descriptive task associated with traditional academic exegesis. Indeed, contra the claims of secular interpreters, this function of the literal sense (in its canonical shape, see below) as "witness" to an external truth creates the very possibility of genuine exegesis, in which the text can be confronted in all its dimensions!²⁸ Thus, for example, if biblical authority functions at the level of the interpretive framework within which the literal sense takes shape (see section 1), then the need for a theory of sacred language and text is obviated. This creates space for precise textual description. The confession that the unity of Scripture is theological and exists at the level of its spiritual and not literal sense abrogates the need for arbitrary harmonization of literary sources as well as the need to privilege a particular historical layer. A functional understanding of the Bible as witness for a concrete, historically situated people allows for form critical analysis that highlights the particular forms of this witness—all of which point to a single truth. The fact that this truth does not lie immediately at the level of the literal sense of the witness frees the interpreter from the need to read dogmatic laws into the literal sense, such as theories of universal development or of existential self-understanding.²⁹ Again, the nature of the historically particular text as "witness" necessitates attention to the text's historical minutiae. But this witness opposes the assumptions of historicism that "these tools open the true avenue to 'what really happened' and provide a means of bypassing the biblical witness to God's redemptive purpose with Israel."³⁰

These convictions were already laid out in essence by Childs in 1964, before he developed his "canonical approach." It is significant to grasp this as his commitment to the concept and value of "canonical process" (see section 1), which is derivative of his understanding of these texts as a historical witness for a concrete people to concrete reality in time. The concept of "witness" in its first instance is not tied to the final form of the text, but rather emphasizes the particularity of the text in all its dimensions. More important than "final form" is a commitment to the particular form in which the prophets and apostles bore witness to God. Israel's concern to pass on its witness in a new form so that God's revelation would be accessible to a new generation is everywhere evident in his earlier historical-critical

27 Ibid., 87–88.

28 Cf. B. Childs, "Interpretation in Faith: The Theological Responsibility of an Old Testament Commentary," *Interpretation* 18:40 (1964): 438.

29 In another context, Childs states, "The problem of developing theological norms with which to evaluate the diversity within the Old Testament finally forces the interpreter outside the context of the Old Testament and raises the broader question of scripture and canon." See Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 127.

30 Childs, "Interpretation in Faith," 440. See section 1 for the importance of perspective in theological interpretation.

works.³¹ Failure to grasp this point has characterized critique of Childs' position throughout his career; hence, in his final published book before his death in 2004, he once again had to set the record straight. In response to accusations of a-historicism or an arbitrary privileging of the final form, Childs says:

The truth is that I agree with von Rad's position that no stage in the Old Testament's long history of growth is obsolete, and that something of each phase has been conserved until its final form. The confusion arises from a disagreement on the nature of the exegetical task being undertaken. It is one thing to attempt to understand the Old Testament as the sacred scriptures of the church. It is quite another to understand the study of the Bible in history-of-religions categories. Both tasks are legitimate, but they are different in goal and procedure. The hermeneutical issue at stake does not lie in an alleged contrast between historical process and scripture's final form. To understand the Bible as scripture means to reflect on the *witnesses* of the text transmitted through the testimony of the prophets and apostles. It involves an understanding of biblical history as the activity of God testified to in scripture. In contrast, a history-of-religions approach attempts to reconstruct a history according to the widely accepted categories of the Enlightenment, as a scientifically objective analysis according to the rules of critical research prescribed by common human experience. . . . [T]he two approaches are different in goals, assumptions and results. Yet the complexity is manifest in that the two are to be neither fused nor separated from each other. There is a subtle interrelationship that must be maintained. . . . The confusion respecting the final form of the canonical text arises because of the failure to recognize that two different approaches to exegesis are involved that do not share a common understanding of history. To speak of the privileged state of the canonical form is not to disregard Israel's past history.³² However, it refuses to fuse the canonical process of the shaping of the

31 Cf. n. 28. See also Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 55, where Childs writes, concerning the chief problem of relating a new generation of Israel to the traditions of Moses: "No longer has Israel direct access to the redemptive events of the past. Now memory takes on central theological significance. Present Israel has not been cut off from redemptive history, but she encounters the same covenant God through a living tradition. Memory provides a link between past and present . . . redemptive history has not ceased." See also Childs, *Myth and Reality*, 102: "The reality with which the Old Testament is concerned is anchored to the totality of Israel. Reality is not found in historical happenings which impinge from above upon Israel and to which she subsequently adds subjective reflection. All such distinctions do not take seriously the fact that God has made himself known in the total experience of Israel. In the memory, consciousness, and reflections of Israel, Old Testament *Heilsgeschichte* has taken place. *The Old Testament contains a history only because Israel gave her experience a coherent formulation*" (italics mine).

32 See section 6 for how a "dialectical" understanding of history underpins this approach.

witness of the prophets and apostles with an allegedly objective scientific reconstruction that uses a critical filter to eliminate those very features that constitute its witness, namely, the presence of God in the history of Israel and the church.³³

A few words should finally be said concerning just what Childs means when he talks about the “literal sense” of the text. In his article of 1964, he believed this to mean the text in all its dimensions. The various stages of literary development should be sorted out, the genre and functions of the texts identified, and the possible cultural contexts in which these texts functioned—both originally and more importantly within the developing tradition of Israel. This was consonant with his view that “the reality with which the Old Testament is concerned is anchored to the totality of Israel,” whereby the task of historical criticism was to reconstruct “the total life of historical Israel.”³⁴ However, his focus on canon led him to see that the “reception of the text by the community now constitutes an integral part of the theological ‘data’ of Scripture and cannot be separated from the text.”³⁵ He came to see that “the concept of canon involves many basic hermeneutical implications which make clear why the church’s task of interpreting the Scriptures cannot be simply identified with, or be an elaboration of, the historical-critical method.”³⁶ This reception involved a *Sachkritik* in which judgments were made concerning who were the faithful tradents of divine revelation (Moses not Korah, Jeremiah not Hananiah): Voices were subordinated or omitted; others, highlighted. In short, “Israel shaped its literature confessionally to bear testimony to what it received as containing an established range of witness.”³⁷ It is this text as shaped by the community of faith that has served the church as the *sensus literalis*.

Confusion over this term has arisen due to the subtle shift in meaning it has undergone since the Enlightenment. In the eighteenth century, the identity of the explicative sense and the historical reference of the text was attacked. The plain sense was separated from the historical sense so that a number of interpretive options were opened up. Increasingly, both conservative and liberal scholars grew to assume that the meaning of the biblical text lay in its historical reference, and the issue of historical factuality came to dominate the discussion. “The task of

33 Childs, *Struggle*, 321. Childs attributes such misconstrual first to J. Barr (*Holy Scripture*, 1983), which was then picked up by J. Barton (*Reading the Old Testament*, 1984) and continued by E. Nicholson (*The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century*, 1998) and a host of others. In his review of the canon in recent biblical studies, Childs praises recent German work for not making the mistake of their Anglo-Saxon colleagues, namely, posing the hermeneutical problem of the growth of the canon in terms of canonical process or final form interpretation. Instead, the focus has been on the *nature* of the process and the *nature* of final form. See Childs, *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, 52. Though see his warnings on the same page!

34 Childs, *Myth and Reality*, 103. Cf. n. 15 above.

35 B. Childs, “A Response,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 2 (1980): 190.

36 Childs, “The Old Testament as Scripture of the Church,” 714.

37 B. Childs, “Walter Brueggemann’s Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53:2 (2000): 230.

exegesis lay in working out the true historical reference since revelation no longer consisted in the words, but exclusively in the subject matter to which the words referred."³⁸ As a result,

the aim of the interpreter was to reconstruct the original occasion of the historical reference on the basis of which the truth of the biblical text could be determined. In sum, the *sensus literalis* had become *sensus originalis*.³⁹

Of significance is Childs' insight that the post-Enlightenment's exclusive focus on the historical referentiality of the text (i.e., on the text's *subject matter*) finds its parallel in allegorical attempts to push through the text to attain the text's spiritual subject matter. The dangers of allegorical practice in drowning out the text's plain sense find their correlate in historical criticism in the following four ways.⁴⁰ First, the medieval application of the various senses often threatened to destroy the significance of the literal sense. In the same way, historical criticism threatens to destroy the integrity of the literal sense, which now functions as a window to a historical reality behind the text. Second, just as within (bad) medieval allegory all control of exegesis was lost through the abuse of the multiple senses, critical biblical interpretation has become a speculative enterprise as the fixed literary parameters of the plain sense dissolve before hypothetical reconstructions. Third, the canonical process, which shaped the text to function as Scripture for a community of faith, is denigrated as it is now assumed that there are other avenues to truth beside the tradition. The medieval parallel is seen in the tension between text and tradition. Finally, an insurmountable gap arises between the historical sense, now fully anchored in the past, and the search for its present relevance for the modern age. The medieval parallel is seen in that attempt by some Christian theologians to abandon all concern with the literal sense of the text in order to construct a relevant theology.

In contrast to these moves, Childs claims that

[t]he literal sense of the text is the plain sense witnessed to by the community of faith. It makes no claim of being the original sense, or even of being the best. Rather, the literal sense of the canonical Scriptures offers a critical theological norm for the community of faith on how the tradition functions authoritatively for future generations of the faithful.⁴¹

The hermeneutical move which tries to bridge the gap between past and present must, as outlined in section 1, take place in terms of the literal sense of the final form of the text. This literal sense is not in tension with the spiritual (or figurative) sense, but rather serves different functions within the community of faith. Indeed,

38 Childs, "The *Sensus Literalis* of Scripture," 89.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 90–92.

41 Ibid., 92.

[t]he literal sense of the text is the indispensable key for the hermeneutical task of actualizing the tradition because in its shaping of the tradition it has critically rendered the material into a form suitable for future accommodation.⁴²

3. SCRIPTURE'S TWO TESTAMENTS

Despite the universal assent within the Christian church to a two-testamental Bible, there are two issues which have never received a single resolution: the scope of the Christian canon and the nature of the relationship between its two parts. The church has struggled throughout the centuries to understand the theological implications of this reality. From the Enlightenment onwards, the issue was understood in history-of-religions terms. As such, the academy has largely ignored the theological question as irrelevant.

Central to a theological approach is the confession that Scripture is a "witness" to divine truth, which in the New Testament and early church was understood to be Christological. For the early church, the ability of the Old and New Testaments to point to God's redemptive intervention for the world in Jesus Christ enabled them to be authoritative. The various formulations of this intervention are expressed in the *summa* of church tradition (i.e., attempts to comprehend the Gospel to which the Bible points). This broad confessed reality, formulated in church tradition yet said to find its source in the Word, provides us with two principles which have been operative throughout church history.⁴³ On the one hand, there is the concern that the truth of the apostolic witness be preserved. The commitment to guard this witness in the early church led to efforts to guarantee the proper scope of the sacred writings and to preserve the biblical text from corruption. Jerome argued for the Hebrew form of the Old Testament on the basis of the fact that the Word of God to Israel had been preserved in the Hebrew Scriptures, which were then translated. Equally important was the view that the Jews were the proper tradents of the tradition (Rom. 1.4) and that Jesus stemmed from the Patriarchs "according to the flesh" (Rom. 9.5). Therefore, "to use a different collection of Old Testament writings from those accepted by the Jews appeared as a threat to the theological continuity of the people of God."⁴⁴

On the other hand, there was another concern to emphasize the catholicity of the Christian faith that was expressed in an unbroken continuity of sacred tradition from its risen Lord to his church.⁴⁵ The church fathers—to determine a book's authority—used as a major criterion the testimony of the most ancient congregations that had a claim to historical continuity with the earliest Apostolic tradition and that represented the most inclusive geographical testimony of the universal church. In addition to this, two other criteria were the widespread use of the LXX in the New Testament itself and the amenability of the Greek rendering to Christian interpretation.

42 Ibid., 93.

43 Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 64.

44 Ibid., 65.

45 Ibid.

Though it is clear that Childs prefers the first criterion,⁴⁶ he is aware that the issue remains unresolved and calls for respect of this diversity. A “kerygmatic,” i.e., christological, reading of Scripture leads to a view of the situation as a polarity between Word and tradition, which find their analogue in the broader and narrower canons. The church’s task is to stand within this tension, struggling continually to discern the truth of God being revealed in Scripture while at the same time being aware that she stands within a fully human, ecclesiastical tradition that remains the tradent of the Word.⁴⁷ To summarize:

the complete canon of the Christian church as the rule-of-faith sets for the community of faith the proper theological context in which we stand, but it also remains continually the object of critical theological scrutiny subordinate to its subject matter who is Jesus Christ. This movement from the outer parameters of tradition to the inner parameters of Word is constitutive of the theological task.⁴⁸

The choice to see the text as “witness” (to its substance, i.e., God and Christ) also plays a central role in contemplating the nature of the relationship between the two testaments. The juxtaposition of the two testaments to form the Christian Bible arose, not simply to establish a historical continuity between Israel and the church, but above all as an affirmation of a theological continuity. This simple juxtaposition allowed for a diversity of strategies by which to understand the nature of the relationship in variegated witness of each to the one divine truth: the one purpose of God, the one redemptive history, the one people of God, prophecy and fulfillment, law and gospel, shadow and substance, etc.⁴⁹

Hermeneutically, however, this juxtaposition of the two testaments is of a different order than the canonical shaping that gave us the individual books in the first place. There is no analogy to the multilayering activity of tradents who were continually at work in the individual testaments, “bringing the authorita-

46 See his arguments in favor of the MT in Childs, *Introduction*, 659–71. For example, he writes: “The threat which is posed by overemphasizing the discontinuity between the Christian and Hebrew Bible is that of severing the ontological relationship between Christianity and Judaism” (671).

47 Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 67.

48 Ibid, 68. Childs summarizes the issue once again in 2004 in terms of the early church’s intentions in canonizing the texts: “The . . . struggle to define the scope of [the church’s] scriptures during the next centuries was driven by several concerns. First, the function of establishing a canon was to preserve the truth of the apostolic witness upon which the faith was grounded. Second, the canon served to preserve the catholicity of the faith by establishing a parameter inside of which the church’s theological diversity was acknowledged (John, Paul, Peter), yet outside of which heresy threatened. The implication of the privileged status of scripture was that its witness was not primarily formulated in terms of a single doctrinal formula, but rather as a prescribed circle designating the accepted range of confessions transmitted in the worship of historic Christian congregations (Jerusalem, Rome, Antioch, etc.).” See Childs, *Struggle*, 314.

49 Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 74.

tive writings into conformity with a larger canonical intentionality.”⁵⁰ This “canonical shaping” of a different order is comparable to the composition of the fourfold Gospel collection. Just like the two testaments, the Gospels were also simply juxtaposed without an attempt to make the individual books conform to a single redactional pattern. The hermeneutical importance lies in the resulting effect of the juxtaposition than in a single editorial intentionality. In contrast to the two-testamental canon, however, within the fourfold Gospel collection there is no cross-referencing amongst the individual Gospels. Each of the individual Gospels, however, makes constant and explicit reference to the Old Testament—albeit in different ways. Indeed, the use of the Old Testament plays a major role in the canonical shaping of each of the Gospels and many of the New Testament letters as well. Childs draws the following implication from this observation:

The influence of the Old Testament on the individual shaping of the Gospels belongs to the level of the New Testament’s compositional history and cannot be directly related to the formation of the Christian Bible *qua* collection. This means that the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament, either by direct citation or allusion, cannot provide a central category for Biblical Theology because this cross-referencing operates on a different level. There is no literary or theological warrant for assuming that the forces which shaped the New Testament can be simply extended to the level of Biblical Theology involving theological reflection on both testaments.⁵¹

Just as the literal sense must be preserved from being subsumed in a construal of its “spiritual” referent, so must the integrity of the two testaments be preserved in their joint witness to their one theological reality. “The Old Testament bears its true witness as the Old which remains distinct from the New. It is promise not fulfillment. Yet its voice continues to sound and it has not been stilled by the fulfillment of the promise.”⁵²

This fact should warn biblical theologians against the extremes of overemphasizing either continuity or discontinuity between the two testaments. On the one hand, the New Testament is neither the culmination of a unified tradition-historical trajectory nor a midrashic extension of the Hebrew Scriptures. On the other hand, the designation of the Old Testament as “old” is not a reference to its failure and rejection. The canonical relationship is far more complex, in which the Old is understood by its relation to the New, but the New is incomprehensible apart from the Old. The Christian canon asserts the continuing integrity of the Old Testament witness so that it must be heard on its own terms. Yet the New Testament also tells its own story in which something totally new enters the picture. The complexity of the issue is seen in the fact that this totally new witness is borne in terms of the old, and thereby transforms the Old Testament. In reflecting on the whole Chris-

50 *Ibid.*, 75.

51 *Ibid.*, 76.

52 *Ibid.*, 77.

tian Bible with its two very different voices, it must be borne in mind that there is no one overarching hermeneutical theory by which to resolve the tension. The continuing challenge of biblical theology “is to engage in the continual activity of theological reflection which studies the canonical text in detailed exegesis, and seeks to do justice to the witness of both testaments in the light of its subject matter who is Jesus Christ.”⁵³

4. THE DIVINE AND HUMAN AUTHORSHIP OF SCRIPTURE

a. The Relation between the Two

The church has always confessed that it is God’s voice in Scripture addressing people in divine speech (Exod. 20:1ff., 34:1ff.), while at the same time human authors were designated as communicating the teachings of God (Moses, David, evangelists, and apostles).⁵⁴ The relationship between the two, however, has never reached a consensus. Childs lists various attempts throughout history to clarify and defend this reality, such as Thomas Aquinas’ concept of the human authors as “instrumental cause,” Calvin’s theory of accommodation, and orthodox views of inerrancy. Each view has had its currency and has then been overwhelmed by new challenges. Childs’ concern is not to develop an alternative theory but rather to delineate the contours of the theological claim and thus the arena within which genuine Christian struggling with this issue can continue.

Within the Bible itself, the human agents of God’s will to Israel and the church claimed within their own writings that their testimony had been inspired by God. This claim was made in different ways, such as narrative descriptions of a theophany in which divine words were received and transmitted to the people (Exod. 19:1–20), introductory formulae such as “the vision that Isaiah saw” (Isa. 1:1) or “thus saith the Lord.” The continuity of God’s speaking is best formulated in Heb. 1:1–2: “In many and various ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days has spoken to us by a Son.”⁵⁵

The question arises, How was it possible that fallible human words could have been received as words from God? The answer harks back to the definition of authority given in section 1: “they were regarded so not only because of their divine source, but also by their assigned role as medium of God’s continuing communication.”⁵⁶ “The crucial action of rendering the human words of the past as the continuing divine message—the rendering of human speech into divine speech—was achieved by the promise of the Holy Spirit” (John 14:26; Acts 1:8, 16; 1 Cor. 2:10, 13).⁵⁷ Childs adds that “the human words were not appropriated, changed or semantically filtered, but illuminated in their original temporal form as a divine vehicle.”⁵⁸

This spiritual element of divine guidance introduces into the equation an

53 Ibid., 78.

54 Childs, *Struggle*, 309.

55 Childs, “Speech-act Theory and Biblical Interpretation,” 379.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., 380.

58 Ibid.

element of subjectivity that cannot be totally controlled or circumscribed. Childs talks of the dynamic nature of the biblical God who both makes himself known and also hides himself (see Amos 8:11–12).⁵⁹ The ability of the Scriptures to evoke continually new and fresh understandings was commensurate with the promised Spirit of the resurrected Christ to illuminate and guide the church through the Word. Scripture thus has a voice that exerts coercion on its readers. Faithful interpretation involves a response to this theocentric force. In this way, a significant element of the challenge of “wrestling with Scripture” lies in the struggle to acquire the capacity to receive its message.⁶⁰

Childs illustrates this dynamic by taking a glance at the modern history of the church. For Childs, German theology within the Confessing Church in the 1920s and 1930s underwent a paradigm shift that brought its members into fresh and empowering contact with God and his Gospel. Karl Barth, among others, talked of the strange new world of the Bible, a vision which empowered him to resist National Socialism “like an ancient Hebrew prophet.”⁶¹ While cultural or political factors certainly contributed to this shift, such explanations do not get to the heart of the matter. Those involved in this new vision of the Bible spoke of responding to a powerful voice from Scripture itself, language echoing with older models exemplified by the church fathers and the Reformers. “The coercion of the biblical text occurred in different ways, often matching the unique personalities of each interpreter, but theirs was always a stance of reception. . . . In every case, the Scriptures were the vehicle for the transformation of perspective.”⁶² Childs compares Gunkel’s interpretation of Genesis 1 with Bonhoeffer’s. Gunkel, inspired by German Romanticism, sought to instill an aesthetic appreciation for the creative genius of this ancient, primitive document. Bonhoeffer saw in Gen. 1:1 an affirmation of the Gospel, which plunges the reader into a new dimension of reality.⁶³ In awe Childs exclaims: “What a different vision from that of Gunkel! Were they even reading the same text?” At the heart of this paradigm shift “was a new perception of the reality of God and a fresh grappling with the substance of

59 “. . . I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it.”

60 Childs, *Struggle*, 315.

61 B. Childs, “Interpreting the Bible Amid Cultural Change,” *Theology Today* 54 (1997): 203.

62 ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 204.

63 *Ibid.*, 205. Bonhoeffer’s comments are as follows: “The Bible begins with God’s free affirmation . . . free revelation of himself. . . . In the beginning, out of freedom, out of nothing, God created the heavens and the earth. This is the comfort with which the Bible addresses us . . . who are anxious before the false void, the beginning without a beginning and the end without an end. It is the gospel, it is the resurrected Christ of whom one is speaking here. God is in the beginning and he will be in the end. . . . The fact that he lets us know this is mercy, grace, forgiveness and comfort.” See D. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1–3* (London: SCM, 1959), 11, 16.

the Bible as providing the true content of the Christian faith.”⁶⁴

Despite the agency of the Spirit working through Scripture in bringing about shifts in perception, these shifts are not purely irrational or arbitrary. Theologically, the creation of the canon of Scripture was never claimed by the church to be its own work, but was itself understood to be a response to the divine coercion of the living Word of God. Thus, “the concept of canon was a corollary of inspiration.”⁶⁵ Within this rule of faith, understood as both the hermeneutical structure of the canon and the *summa* of authentic Christian response to the substance of this canon, Childs identifies the following five pointers for understanding the ways of God in the world:⁶⁶

1. Christian spiritual vitality necessitates wrestling with the Bible as the *vehicle* of God’s word. “To speak of moving beyond the Bible always signals a return to the wilderness and a loss of divine blessing.”
2. Scripture functions properly within the life of the church only if it is heard addressing issues of life and death. When received as a divine gift to believers, the Bible becomes a guide for faith and practice.
3. There is a family resemblance among the ways in which faithful response to the Bible occurs. A likeness arises from the serious encounter with the selfsame God who shapes obedient response into Christian likeness, with a parallel family resemblance on the side of unbelief and skepticism.
4. The Bible calls for faithful reflection, but also for faithful action. Where there is true understanding of the Scriptures, by necessity there arises an imperative for evangelism and mission, a care for the impoverished and suffering.
5. Finally, built into the New Testament’s proclamation of the Gospel is the promise of fresh growth and understanding. Change in the sense of growth in the knowledge of God is built into the Christian faith. Our understanding of the Bible can never be static. “Its pages continue to radiate fresh guidance into the knowledge of God and his Son.”

b. The Unity of Scripture in its Diverse Transmission

Despite the Jewish people’s role as tradents of the Old Testament witness, the Christian church received the Jewish Scriptures largely through Greek translations. A hermeneutical problem arose when it was perceived that the Hebrew text and the Greek Septuagint did not always agree. Over the years, various hermeneutical attempts have been offered by which to address the issue, such as allegory, various forms of harmonization, the subjugation of the Old Testament to its New Testament reception, dismissal of the issue by reference to history-of-religions categories, or post-modern appeals to the freedom of the creative imagination.⁶⁷

From Childs’ perspective, the issue of textual tradition is derivative of the concept of canon, as it was only when the “formation of the literature had reached

64 Childs, “Interpreting the Bible Amid Cultural Change,” 206.

65 Childs, “Speech-act Theory and Biblical Interpretation,” 381.

66 See Childs, “Interpreting the Bible Amid Cultural Change,” 210–11.

67 Childs, *Struggle*, 311–12.

a final stage of development within the canonical process [that] concern for the text of the literature emerge[d].”⁶⁸ As such, there is an analogy to the considerations in section 3, where the integrity of the individual testaments are held in critical tension with the one divine reality to which they testify. The same analogy is found in section 2, where the fundamental focus of Christian interpretation is on the spiritual sense, while still tied to and held in critical tension with the literal sense in its integrity. And so it is in this case: biblical theology does not attempt to remain at the textual level, as this would be to miss the key which unites dissident voices into a harmonious whole. Instead, the attempt should be made to hear the different voices in relation to the divine reality to which they point in diverse ways. To fail to grapple with this underlying substance of the two witnesses—and thus to collapse the spiritual and literal senses into one meaning—is to commit the sin that Childs calls “Biblicism.” Biblicism is the attempt to remain at the time-conditioned level of the text while attempting to read the Bible theologically. This move can be seen in attempts to adopt simply the particular interpretive methods of various New Testament authors as normative for today, as well as in the attempt to elect one text tradition as more authentic or somehow spiritually deeper. Such a move is to misunderstand the theological relation of the text’s authority to its function as kerygmatic witness.⁶⁹

5. THE CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTENT OF THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE

As has been repeatedly emphasized in this essay, a key concept of Childs is that the texts of the Bible function for Christians as “witness” to the reality of God. This witness is formulated in the New Testament as the message of the Gospel. This message is related to the Jewish scriptures both in terms of a historical sequence (i.e., Jesus appeared in the “fullness of time,” Gal. 4.4), as well as on an ontological plane. Childs cites John 1.1, Col. 1.15ff., and Rev. 13.8 as examples of “a mode of speech in relation to a subject matter which disregards or transcends temporal sequence.”⁷⁰ As Childs said in one of his first publications, the Old Testament is not just a preparation for Jesus Christ but a manifestation of him.⁷¹

68 Childs, *Introduction*, 94.

69 Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 85. If one text tradition is to be preferred, then Childs has argued for the MT, not based on inherent properties, but rather to maintain the ontological unity of the people of God (Israel/church). This parallels the larger debate regarding the canon. See his arguments in Childs, *Introduction*. Seitz’s definition of Biblicism is also helpful: “. . . to say that we are not apostles means that we cannot approach the Old Testament as did Jesus and the apostles, as though their reading can be naively our own. . . . Childs calls this sort of move ‘biblicist’ because it likewise ignores the intruding witness of the New Testament and an accurate assessment of its role as canon: which is to serve as a testimony to Jesus Christ and not a guidesheet for Christian exegesis of the Old Testament.” See Seitz, *Word Without End*, 107.

70 Childs, “Interpreting the Bible Amid Cultural Change,” 60. These verses state that Jesus is, respectively, the eternal Word who was with God in the beginning, “the image of the invisible God, first-born of all creation,” and “the lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

71 Childs, *Myth and Reality*, 103. Here the relationship between Old Testament

A criticism of this move from text to subject matter is that it opens the path to uncontrolled allegory when loosed from the controls of historical critical exegesis. In addition, the question is raised as to whether such a hermeneutical approach undermines the canonical function of the Old Testament, which was to preserve Israel's Scripture according to its own integrity. Since the hermeneutical circle and the nature of the *sensus literalis* have been discussed in section 2, the discussion will now focus on this Christological dimension of the issue.

Childs defends a multiple-level reading according to different contexts—but one where the integral contact between text and subject matter is not blurred. Rather, he suggests “a single method of interpretation which takes seriously both the different dimensions constituting the text as well as distinct contexts in which the text functions.”⁷² As mentioned in section 2, there is no fixed temporal order in the exegesis: we already come to the text with a dogmatic framework, which is then altered in the light of the text. However, for pedagogical reasons, Childs illustrates this move by taking us from the more familiar exegetical activity to the more complex reflective enterprise:⁷³

1. The Old Testament's witness must be heard in its own voice (section 3), which means it must be interpreted within its historical, literary, and canonical context. The genre of story, for example, excludes the possibility of having Jesus Christ read back into it, since promise and fulfillment cannot be fused in this context.
2. This literal/historical reading can be extended by placing it within the context of the two-part canon. Structural similarities and dissimilarities between both testaments are analyzed in which the aim is to pursue a relationship of content. For example, in terms of an understanding of God, such a reading inquires as to which features the two testaments hold in common respecting the mode, intention, and goal of God's manifestations. This theological relationship is pursued both on the level of the textual witness and on that of the discrete matter (*res*) of the two collections.
3. The pursuit of the theological relationships between the two testaments provides an avenue towards comprehending the greater theological unity of the Christian Bible. The reality that undergirds the two testaments should not be held apart and left fragmented but should be critically reunited. When this reality is confronted, however, the interpreter is compelled to understand the biblical text from the context of this fuller horizon. In reference to the Old Testament's witness to Christ, this means moving beyond the unique voice of the prophets' testimony to a coming royal figure. Rather, “in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the history of Israel, the texts of both testaments in their fragmentary testimony to God's utterly mysterious purpose of new creation and redemption take on fresh life. Thus, when the interpreter moves from the reality of God manifest in action back to the Scriptures themselves for

and church is expressed in terms of the “New Israel” as witness to divine reality.

72 Childs, “Interpreting the Bible Amid Cultural Change,” 61.

73 See *ibid.*, 61–63.

further illumination, he or she is constrained to listen for a new song to break forth from the same ancient, sacred texts. As a result, in spite of generations of scholarly denial, few Christians can read Isaiah 53 without sensing the amazing morphological fit with the passion of Jesus Christ."⁷⁴

In sum, Childs is proposing "a text-oriented hearing of Scripture by a Christian community of faith which allows biblical texts to resonate from the force of divine reality gained through an encounter with the entire Christian Bible."⁷⁵

6. THE DIALECTICAL NATURE OF HISTORY

Childs notes that an intense interest in the nature of history has been an enduring characteristic of the Christian interpretation of the Bible from its inception.⁷⁶ This is hardly surprising when one considers the central role of historical events in both biblical testaments.⁷⁷ Often, a tension is expressed between ordinary and divine events, between inner and outer dimension, or between a confessional perception and a secular one. Childs' term for this differentiation is "dialectical," summarized as the tension between empirical history and God's unique action in history. The two dimensions cannot be fused, yet they cannot be separated either. Once again, although the church has committed itself to both dimensions throughout its history, consensus has never been reached on the relation of the two. The problem was exacerbated after the Enlightenment, when a direct relation between text and event could no more be assumed.

Childs is critical of both Conservative and Liberal reactions to this problem. The Conservative position is historically untenable and blunts theological issues, whereas the Liberal position is forced to adopt some form of a philosophical system, such as idealism, existentialism, or social functionalism, in order to escape radical religious relativism. In light of this quandary, Childs' goal is to provide a new approach that attempts "to do justice to the theological integrity of Israel's witness while at the same time freely acknowledging the complexities of human knowledge and the serious challenge of modernity to any claims of divine revelation."⁷⁸

Childs suggests the following four avenues for dealing with the tension exegetically in order to delineate more clearly the ways in which a faithful interpretation of the Bible can be alive to both dimensions:⁷⁹

1. Israel's history reflects both an inner and an outer dimension, i.e., there

74 Ibid., 62, 63.

75 Ibid., 63.

76 Childs, *Struggle*, 317.

77 See Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 97: "It seems to be an incontestable observation that the Hebrew scriptures bear testimony to God's redemption and preservation of historical Israel. The witnesses of Moses and the prophets, of the psalmists and sages, all arose within Israel's history and relate in various ways to it. Moreover, when these witnesses were collected into a scripture, Israel's story of faith was largely preserved in a historical sequence (Genesis through Ezra) along with a variety of 'commentary' (Psalms, Prophets, Wisdom)."

78 Ibid., 99.

79 Ibid., 100, 101.

is both confessional witness and common public testimony. The contrast lies in viewing history from Israel's confessional stance, from within a community of faith rather than from a neutral, phenomenological reconstruction. Nevertheless, the relation between the two is subtle, as neither perspective functions as a hermetically sealed system that functions in absolute independence from the other. The theological challenge is to exegete the passages in such a way as "to avoid rationalistic assumptions of a common reality behind all religious expression or the threat of super-naturalism which would deny in principle any relation between an outer and inner side of historical events."⁸⁰

2. Israel's history involves both divine and human agency. The biblical witness to divine intervention in time and space is threatened if a historical methodology interprets such formulations as merely literary conventions which must be made to conform to the general laws of historical causality. However, the Bible reflects a great variety of relationships between the human and divine which spans a spectrum from closest interaction to harshest discontinuity. The exegetical challenge is "to do justice to the different dimensions of textual intensity (*Dichtigkeitsgrad*) without being trapped into rigid philosophical systems of historical causality."⁸¹

3. Israel's history is construed within the Old Testament as oscillating between the past, present, and future. The methodological challenge is to avoid a theological move "which would objectify Israel's history into a separate sphere of *Heilsgeschichte* which functions independently of all common experience. Conversely it is not helpful to flatten Israel's special historical experiences into general chronological patterns which have been reconstituted from extra-biblical sources."⁸²

4. Israel's history is depicted within the Old Testament in terms of foreground and background, i.e., there is conscious selection. One must learn to do justice to Israel's peculiar assigning of significance to certain events and situations while denigrating others. The challenge is to avoid the arrogance of correcting Israel's judgment on the assumption of modern critical superiority while maintaining a sophisticated historical sensitivity that can "adjudicate the just claims arising from two sides of this genuine dialectical tension."⁸³

CONCLUSION: A STRUGGLE WITHIN BOUNDARIES

There has been talk in Christian circles concerning the appropriateness of a non-foundational approach to Christian theology.⁸⁴ C. Bartholomew has spoken of theology and philosophy as academic disciplines which are both traditioned.⁸⁵

80 Ibid., 100.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid., 101.

83 Ibid.

84 See, for example, S. Grenz and J. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

85 C. Bartholomew, "Philosophy, Theology and the Crisis in Biblical Interpretation," in *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*, ed. C. Bartholomew, C. Greene, and K.

It seems as if an age that is no longer confident in the ability of autonomous human rationality to provide us with the answers we seek concerning genuine Christian discipleship and faithfulness is in need of the canonical approach as Childs presents it. Rather than providing us with fixed absolutes upon which to build a sure and steady theological structure, Childs provides a compass to guide us in our struggle. Or perhaps better said, he alerts us to the boundaries within which the church has struggled and ought to continue to struggle as it endeavors to hear the voice of God in obedience.

As we have seen, part of the history of the people of God involved a response to their Scripture in which a framework to the sacred traditions was given and within which the material was to be interpreted by and for the church. This framework serves the interpreter both a positive and negative criterion for assessing those interpretations that fall outside of the theological restraints provided for its faithful reading.⁸⁶ This has led Seitz to identify the heart of Childs' biblical theology as an outworking of the fact that "we are neither prophets nor apostles." This may be the hermeneutical heart of Childs' proposal, a description of how one should do biblical theology given our contemporary "season" of interpretation. But I would suggest that the true theological heart of Childs' canonical approach is belief in the content of the *regula fidei* itself:

. . . the faith in one God the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth and the seas and all things that are in them; and in the one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was enfleshed for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets preached the Economies, the coming, the birth from a Virgin, the passion, the resurrection from the dead, the bodily ascension into heaven of the Son, Christ Jesus our Lord, and His coming from heaven in the glory of the Father to recapitulate all things, and to raise up all flesh of the whole human race.⁸⁷

This story is about the salvation of the real world, a world which matters. It is a reality that encompasses both the formation of the text and its ongoing interpretation by a people called to witness to this reality. Childs' "canonical approach" does not claim to be the last word on matters of faith. Such a claim would obviate the need for the Holy Spirit and genuine discipleship in a world on the move and yet still hungry for relationship. Nevertheless, given this eschatological scenario, Childs' canonical approach is a serious contribution to the church in its ongoing struggle.

Philip Sumpter is a doctoral student at the University of Gloucestershire.

Möller (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2000), 33.

86 Cf. Childs, "Speech-act Theory and Biblical Interpretation," 383–84.

87 This is the rule of faith of the early Christian church as Irenaeus knew it. See D. J. Unger, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies* (New York: The Newman Press, 1992), 49.

LATER CHILDS

Daniel Driver

At the memorial session for Brevard Childs hosted by SBL in San Diego last November, Erhard Gerstenberger addressed the problem of continuity and change in Childs' many works. His conclusion, after revising Childs' early form-critical studies in light of later developments, was that core threads of continuity run through Childs' entire career. Gerstenberger's remarks are significant because they challenge the usual view and because they come from a long-standing friend to Childs as well as sometime critic of the canonical approach.

Gerstenberger is on target here, in my view, and in what follows I will presuppose the overarching continuity he finds. Instead of the early Childs, however, this essay will focus on the mature statements of the later Childs over approximately the last fifteen years. It aims to say something of this work's character, but to begin, let us consider where it fits. To anticipate, my claim will be that Childs' work is not the mean between left and right, nor a quest for Arcadia, but rather a broad interconfessional and international range of engagement.

I. NOT THE MEAN

If one only has two hands, Childs can be difficult to locate. He made liberals and conservatives nervous, the former most often for providing succor to the latter. James Barr, who seemed a credible authority on the fundamentalist mindset, once warned that Childs' *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* contains "exactly what conservative ears want to hear." For Barr, critical scholarship makes "a quite *decisive* difference to our understanding of scripture." Equivocation on the point is dangerous since it "will be welcome to conservative opinion, all the more so because a clearly non-conservative scholar has written it; it will all be quoted by conservative polemicists for the next hundred years."¹ A surprising number of those at home in the critical tradition took Barr's point: Childs is aiding and abetting sworn enemies.

As it happened, few from either camp embraced his work. Two separate journals sponsored review issues of Childs' landmark *Introduction* in 1980. In the wake of such attention, two further review issues offered sets of essays on the hermeneutics of canon (each leading off with an essay by Childs), in German this time, in 1987 and 1988.² Yet by comparison, the 1992 *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, arguably Childs' most important title and unquestion-

1 James Barr, "Childs' Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture," *JSOT* 16 (1980): 12–23, here 15; original emphasis.

2 In addition to the other essays in *JSOT* 16, see *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 2 (1980): 111–211, *Theologische Quartalschrift* 167/4 (1987): 241–289, and Ingo Baldermann et al., eds., *Zum Problem des biblischen Kanons*, Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie, vol. 3 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988).

ably the culmination of decades of study, went virtually unheralded. The contrast is all the more striking in view of Rolf Rendtorff's declaration, made in one of the very few article-length reviews of the latter volume:

Mit dem Erscheinen dieses Buches hat der Satz "Eine 'Biblische Theologie' ist noch nicht geschrieben" seine Gültigkeit verloren. Man muß Brevard Childs zu dem mutigen Unternehmen beglückwünschen, die erste ausgeführte "Biblische Theologie" vorzulegen. Künftig wird sich jede Diskussion über dieses Thema mit dem kühnen und breit angelegten Versuch auseinandersetzen müssen.

[With the arrival of this book, the sentence "a 'biblical theology' has not yet been written" has lost its validity. One must congratulate Brevard Childs for the courageous venture of putting forward the first fully executed "biblical theology." Henceforth any discussion of the topic will have to grapple with this bold and broadly conceived effort.]³

Apart from the small, invested audience that includes Rendtorff, sparse engagement with Childs' magnum opus probably points to declining interest in his work, which once provoked as much controversy as that of any other biblical scholar in the twentieth century. If a bid to understand the Old Testament *as Scripture* brought heated debate, Childs' increased specificity about the christological core of his efforts as a confessing Old Testament scholar ought to have occasioned outrage (Rendtorff, in fact, is scandalized). In the literature at any rate, it seems instead to have occasioned little of anything. When Christopher Seitz writes that "*Biblical Theology* may prove to be a book in search of an audience, and for that reason will be judged by the widest variety of readers as learned but unsatisfactory,"⁴ he may have overestimated the extent to which the book would be read and judged in the first place. Among main-stream scholars of a certain stripe, Childs' mature work seems to have met with relative indifference.

To be sure, a minority has marked and even greeted the later Childs. It is surely significant that *Biblical Theology* was translated into German within two years.⁵ Whatever else one might say about the translation (I hear rumors that it

3 Rolf Rendtorff, "Rezension Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*," *Jarbuch für biblische Theologie* 9 (1994): 359–69, here 359; my translation. Compare *ibid.*, "Die Bibel Israels als Buch der Christen," in *Eine Bibel, Zwei Testamente: Positionen Biblischer Theologie*, ed. Christoph Dohmen and Thomas Söding (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995), 102. The reference is to Henning Graf Reventlow, *Problems of Biblical Theology in the Twentieth Century*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1986), vii.

4 Christopher Seitz, "'We Are Not Prophets or Apostles': The *Biblical Theology* of B. S. Childs," in *Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 102–9, here 109. For a smaller group in which he places himself, the book is "the most brilliant proposal for theological exegesis offered in recent memory, but one unlikely to gain the sort of foothold necessary to transform the church in its use of scripture."

5 Brevard Childs, *Die Theologie der einen Bibel. Bd. 1: Grundstrukturen, Bd.*

became a setback to Childs' reception on the Continent), the fact of its existence indicates a serious level of interest somewhere.⁶ Perhaps it should not be surprising that it occurs where interest in the workings of a "biblical theology" has traditionally been strongest. Even in the German-speaking world where Childs trained, however, positive extensions of the reorientation toward canon appear somewhat marginal, and in any event tend to ignore the fullest articulation of the canonical approach along with its most crucial suggestions for biblical theology.

Childs himself, in his penultimate essay, perceived that the canon debate had run its course by the 1990s.⁷ One may even doubt whether he felt *Biblical Theology* was a serious contribution to that debate, although in my view, his commentary on Isaiah (2001) is an important complement to his foundational, early argument for canonical shaping, developed through the 1970s. But by the time of *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (2004), the full and impressive range of his wrestling with issues *beyond* those on which he was widely challenged in the 1980s becomes unmistakable. My basic point is that the later Childs, since the arrival of his most magisterial volumes, has as a rule not been engaged. Why this might be is difficult to say. For some, such as Barr, the *Introduction* was already too muddle-headed to hold any promise for the future.⁸ And Barr could persuade. Other more sympathetic readers ran into different snags.⁹ So what does one make of the later Childs? The question remains. Also, will he issue a legacy? If so, of what kind? If not for conservative polemicists, then for whom?

Such questions cannot be answered fully or decisively yet, though by returning to the one with which I began, we might approach them circuitously. The "non-conservative scholar" was obviously not a fundamentalist, but then where does he fit? Barr opined that the man had a split personality. That just avoided the question, however. Assuming Childs, or more properly his oeuvre, is not just a confused jumble of critical training and residual pious sentiment, does he lean

2: *Hauptthemen*, trans. Christiane Oeming (Freiburg: Herder, 1994).

6 For recent examples of this interest, see Bernd Janowski, ed., *Kanonhermeneutik: Vom Lesen und Verstehen der christlichen Bibel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2007), and Egbert Ballhorn and Georg Steins, eds., *Der Bibelkanon in der Bibelauslegung: Beispiele exegesen und Methodenreflexionen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007). See also Daniel R. Driver, review of *Der Bibelkanon in der Bibelauslegung: Methodenreflexionen und Beispiele exegesen*, ed. Egbert Ballhorn and Georg Steins, *Review of Biblical Literature* (March 2008), <http://www.bookreviews.org/bookdetail.asp?TitleId=6401>.

7 Brevard Childs, "The Canon in Recent Biblical Studies: Reflections on an Era," *Pro Ecclesia* 14/1 (2005): 26–45.

8 Even when revisiting Childs, as in *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), criticism proceeds largely on the basis of Barr's earlier critiques and without regard for larger coherence in Childs' program. It proved easier to extend the picture of a labile Childs than to revise his analysis.

9 I have mentioned Rendtorff already. Richard Bauckham, review of *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, by Bernard Childs, *Biblical Interpretation* 2 (1994): 246–50, expresses disappointment rather than effrontery.

more to the left or to the right? Early in my reading, I sometimes thought of him splitting of the difference, but this view quickly proved inadequate. After all, like Hans Frei, he was fond of drawing attention to the ironic correspondence between officially opposing ideologies from “both” sides of the spectrum.

For mapping purposes I find a two-dimensional plane rather more useful than a one-dimensional line. The spatial metaphor I have in mind is a compass-inscribed circle. Consider the following statement:

Fundamentalism and pure historical criticism are not simply two poles that may call for a mediating mean on the part of the ecclesially pacific. They are rather two critical perspectives of which each derives from a common foreshortening of the Church’s reality that is, as we have seen, properly correlative with that of Scripture. Connected with this, each denies, in a basic way, the creative and ordering force of divine providence as the sweeping center of the temporal world within which Scripture’s life is given in the Church’s own ambiguous history. Subverted, then, are both formal and material conditions for the hearing of Scripture as the center’s communicative medium.¹⁰

Ephraim Radner and George Sumner, seeking to introduce how diverse essays cohere, ply an image vaguely reminiscent of John Donne’s most famous metaphysical conceit. They recommend thinking

of the theological center as a point that wields the power to define a circumference . . . But “point,” “sweep,” and “coherence” are not separable within the creation of a circle; they form, rather, the single body that envelops the existence of centrality. To say that something in the Christian faith is central, then, is to imply a coherent and complex act, even a kind of life . . . To speak of Christian centralities is to affirm the creative, particular, and historically encompassing life of God as temporally drawn in the figure of Jesus, the Christ.¹¹

Scripture functions in life ordered by God with respect to the “bite” of the compass—it is the median, not the mean. Childs, on this reading, focuses on the material conditions for “the single, full, scripturally inscribed embrace with which God, in Jesus, has taken up our history.”¹² Postliberals, for their part, have underscored the formal conditions for the same. Locations off this map are plotted comparably, too:

Where this coherence is lacking, the resulting positions, whether of a liberal or a conservative stripe, invariably take on an ideological tinge as they assert some orienting perspective that is now cut loose from the

10 Ephraim Radner and George Sumner, eds., *The Rule of Faith: Scripture, Canon, and Creed in a Critical Age* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1998), xvii.

11 Ibid., xi. Or again: “The center is God’s ordering life, not the Church, which must suffer the flux of the present in its opaque swirl” (ibid., xii).

12 Ibid., xxii.

encompassing center we have been describing. Ideology is not simply an imbalance; it is the creation, by default usually, of a new compass with a different point of origin and a constricted sweep.¹³

Rather than a compromise between liberal and conservative poles, then, Childs' insistence on the canon of Scripture as necessarily ingredient in the rule of faith can be better conceptualized as a redrafting of the key vehicle of providence for a decentered Church. Except in this metaphor, the expositor is drawn as much as he draws. Scripture, Childs insists, needs to put *us* on the theological map.

Something like this surfaces remarkably early. "As a fresh alternative," writes Childs in 1970, and I quote him at some length,

We would like to defend the thesis that the canon of the Christian church is the most appropriate context from which to do Biblical Theology. What does this mean? First of all, implied in the thesis is the basic Christian confession, shared by all branches of historic Christianity, that the Old and New Testaments together constitute Sacred Scripture for the Christian church. The status of canonicity is not an objectively demonstrable claim but a statement of Christian belief. In its original sense, *canon* does not simply perform the formal function of separating the books that are authoritative from others that are not, but *is the rule that delineates the area in which the church hears the word of God*. The fundamental theological issue at stake is not the extent of the canon, which has remained in some flux within Christianity, but the claim for a normative body of tradition contained in a set of books.

Again, to speak of the canon as a context implies that these Scriptures must be interpreted in relation to their function within the community of faith that treasured them. The Scriptures of the church are not archives of the past but a channel of life for the continuing church, through which God instructs and admonishes his people. Implied in the use of the canon as a context for interpreting Scripture is a rejection of the method that would imprison the Bible within a context of the historical past. Rather, the appeal to the canon understands Scripture as a vehicle of a divine reality, which indeed encountered an ancient people in the historical past, but which continues to confront the church through the pages of Scripture. The church's prayer for illumination by the Holy Spirit when interpreting Scripture is not a meaningless vestige from a forgotten age of piety, but an acknowledgment of the continuing need for God to make himself known through Scripture to an expectant people. Because the church uses the text as a medium of revelation the interrelation of Bible

13 Ibid., xviii.

and theology is constitutive in the context of the canon. The descriptive and constructive aspects of interpretation may well be distinguished, but never separated when doing Biblical Theology according to this model.¹⁴

In sum, Childs falls not in the difference between left and right, but seeks to behold from within the church the divine reality to which her Scriptures point, and this by means of a redescription of basic conditions for ruled Christian life. In his latter years, Childs had even explored the recovery of allegory, which ought to startle readers. But when professional biblical scholars fail to locate him early on, to grasp the center of his work, one should not be too surprised when his mature suggestions and forays are passed over in silence. Then again, reviews are no index of a thinker's long-range impact. Perhaps the later Childs will yet play some part in the "quiet revolution" to transform the church's use of Scripture such as has been called for by the Scripture Project,¹⁵ though one will have to wait and see.

II. NOR A QUEST FOR ARCADIA

Having considered the line and the plane, mention should be made of a further dimension, often called the fourth in our frame of reference. Time is of course already implicit in concepts like history and providence. More specifically, I have in mind a person's bearing toward time. Anglican poet W. H. Auden describes in "Horae Canonicae" a meeting with his anti-type at dusk (Vespers). Auden is an arcadian, the other a utopian: "between my Eden and his New Jerusalem, no treaty is negotiable." One yearns for innocence; the other, revolution. At this level Auden's aesthetic and political vision (it is Christian, too—encountering his anti-type reminds the poet of the victim "on whose immolation . . . arcadias, utopias, our dear old bag of a democracy, are alike founded") contrasts with Childs' outlook, which is indeed oriented to the New Jerusalem. Alternately, leaving overshot waterwheels and other beautiful pieces of obsolete machinery to the side, I have heard theological conservatism defined as the conviction that the nineteenth century cannot be improved upon, or more reflectively, that the fourth century cannot be improved upon. Yet with Childs' sourcing of Jewish and Christian exegetical traditions, there is, in Seitz's memorable phrase, no driving in the rearview mirror.

Witness the essay "Interpreting the Bible amid Cultural Change." Childs states,

I would like to address the question of why the understanding of the Bible within the Christian church appears to change from generation to generation. For over three decades at Yale Divinity School, I have taught courses in the history of biblical interpretation extending from the earli-

14 Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 99–100; my emphasis.

15 Ellen Davis and Richard Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), xx.

est period of the church to the modern era. One of the most perplexing issues in this study has been trying to understand why there is this phenomenon of change as each new generation seeks to understand and to use its Scriptures authoritatively.¹⁶

Childs acknowledges the explanatory power of two dominant models, which he terms the scientific and the humanistic. Yet he argues that another factor, “the true theological dimension,” needs to be included. Examples of renewal in the church, such as that experienced by the Confessing Church in Germany in the 1920s, turn on “a new perception of the reality of God and a fresh grappling with the substance of the Bible as providing the true content of the Christian faith.” In the decades following World War II, however, a period of theological imitation and stagnation set in. The next generation saw again and again that the emperor had no clothes.¹⁷ Childs then concludes, based as much on his own personal experience of disillusion in the American academy as his study of the Christian tradition, that renewal is rare and comes without warning, and that it is difficult to sustain. It “is ultimately rooted in the theological perception of God,” and the inscrutable workings of providence can, as Amos has it, be “terrifying”¹⁸:

. . . I will send a famine on the land;
not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water,
but of the hearing of the words of the Lord.
They shall wander from sea to sea,
and from north to east;
they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord,
but they shall not find it.

How, then, can one understand the loss of biblical authority and its rediscovery?

Notably, Childs closes by listing five characteristic features of new perception. First, the Bible figures centrally as the vehicle for encountering God. Second, Scripture functions properly when it speaks to the church on matters of life and death. It fails outside this context, or where its message is domesticated. Third, a “family resemblance” can be discerned in faithful response, and also “from the side of unbelief and skepticism.”¹⁹ Fourth, action must accompany reflection on

16 Brevard Childs, “Interpreting the Bible amid Cultural Change,” *Theology Today* 54 (1997): 200–11, here 200. Cf. also his earlier “Some Reflections on the Search for a Biblical Theology,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 4/1 (1982): 1–12, which focuses on shifts of balance between exegesis in the church and the academy and the mutual renewal of both institutions.

17 Childs, “Interpreting the Bible,” 202, 206–07.

18 *Ibid.*, 209–10, and citing Amos 8:11–12.

19 *Ibid.*, 210 (cf. *Struggle* above all). We will return to the point below. Note meanwhile an example used here: “One of the great ironies of the so-called third quest for the historical Jesus, which is presently a fad in many academic circles, is that the same old heresies raised first in the nineteenth century are again surfacing in dreary monotony” (211).

the Word. And fifth, growth and renewal is part of the promise of the gospel.

It is impossible to say in advance exactly how knowledge of God will break through, but it is proper to hope for the transformation that can be recognized, retrospectively, as it falls within parameters given in the rule of faith. In history, writes Childs in another place at about the same time, “a Christian Bible [emerged] that consisted of an Old Testament and New Testament, both witnessing to Jesus Christ, the old testifying in terms of prophecy, and the new of fulfillment. Yet both speak of the future eschatological rule of God.”²⁰ Again, “the Bible is the book of the Church, not that the Church owns the Bible, but rather its understanding requires a stance of expectation, an awaiting for divine illumination.”²¹ Canon, in other words, correlates to inspiration.²²

III. BUT A BROAD INTERCONFESSIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RANGE OF ENGAGEMENT

Childs’ work—and, although I focus on his later work, I think my thesis suits the whole—is not the mean between left and right, nor a quest for arcadia, but is rather a broad interconfessional and international range of engagement in service of church and world. It is an effort to describe “the nature of truly theological exegesis” and to point toward a viable execution of it for his generation, as well as for a future generation. Motivating all this is a deep conviction that the whole enterprise “needs major overhauling.”²³ Timid solutions, tinkering on standard results whether by means of standard tools or else by methodological innovation, could not get to the heart of the problem as Childs saw it. As at so many other points, the same conviction appears early as well as late. His *Introduction* of 1979 begins thus:

Two decades of teaching have brought many changes in my perspective. Having experienced the demise of the Biblical Theology movement in America, the dissolution of the broad European consensus in which I was trained, and a widespread confusion regarding theological reflection in general, I began to realize that there was something fundamentally wrong with the foundations of the biblical discipline. It was not a question of improving on a source analysis, of discovering some unrecognized new genre, or of bringing a redactional layer into sharper focus. Rather, the crucial issue turned on one’s whole concept of the study of the Bible itself. I am now convinced that the relation between the historical critical study of the Bible and its theological use as religious litera-

20 Brevard Childs, “Jesus Christ the Lord and the Scriptures of the Church,” in *The Rule of Faith*, 1–12, here 6.

21 *Ibid.*, 9.

22 Childs makes comments like this on occasion, but rarely. See now Stephen Chapman’s helpful essay “Reclaiming Inspiration for the Bible,” in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew et al., Scripture and Hermeneutics 7; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006, 167–206.

23 Brevard Childs, “The Nature of the Christian Bible: One Book, Two Testaments,” in *The Rule of Faith*, 115–25, here 125.

ture within a community of faith and practice needs to be completely rethought. Minor adjustments are not only inadequate, but also conceal the extent of the dry rot.²⁴

Two and three decades on, revolution in the guild was quietly rumored; yet up to his death in June 2007, Childs pushed ahead diligently in his ambitious project to clear the ground for a fresh hearing of the Word of life, striving once more to overhaul a scholarly discipline he must have loved (*Isaiah*), then setting out in a direction faithfully new (*The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture*), and finally transgressing yet again New Testament specialisms (*The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus: The Church's Guide for Reading Paul*, forthcoming from Eerdmans, Fall 2008). If he could alienate some of his natural allies, it was because he felt that less radical adjustments were doomed to repeat past failures. The solution could not be framed locally, or with the wrong sort of compromise, but had to be in the widest terms possible.

It might seem overly severe, for example, that what turned out to be Childs' final essay mounts an attack on Nicholas Wolterstorff, whose appropriation of speech-act theory he finds "deeply flawed." For Childs, "*Divine Discourse* cannot be deemed hermeneutically successful, nor does it point in a fruitful direction for the serious interpretation of sacred scripture," and he hopes his discussion has made "apparent just how high are the theological stakes in this debate."²⁵ Obviously it goes well beyond my remit at present to weigh the justice of this conclusion. Wolterstorff is not really the issue, and in fact a handful of other prominent Christian academics might have been named instead. Rather, the central point is that because the stakes are high, great energy must be spent critiquing the work of a church-minded scholar when it fails to address adequately the hermeneutical crisis created by "the Enlightenment," to use a prominent Childsian cipher. Essential ingredients—and it is no accident that both figure in the Wolterstorff piece—include the canon in its historic shape as a rule of faith (more ciphers that call upon a wider corpus for explanation) and Scripture's literal sense (by which Scripture's ongoing message is affirmed as somehow not other than the meaning of the biblical sentence itself). But I find it is striking that Childs' strongest critiques are never aimed at his own severest critics. Instead, since his work attends above all to the church's peculiar relationship to its Scripture, he attempts to show the church's scholars that a host of strategies have failed *already*, if our memories are only long enough.

Briefly put, the casting about Childs does later in his career, from Benno Jacob to Campegius Vitranga, from Theodore to Irenaeus, serves a search for guidance in the struggle to hear the entire canon as a witness to its one subject, God in

24 Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 15.

25 Brevard Childs, "Speech-act Theory and Biblical Interpretation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58/4 (2005): 375–92, with reference to Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Christ, through a recognition of two classes of “family resemblance”—those of breach, and those of insight. Jacob, for one, reminds the church of its mysterious link with the synagogue and instructs all sorts of readers, for “long before intertextuality had become a modern fad generated by computer print-outs, [he] listened for every possible resonance within the entire canon.”²⁶ He shows how not to combat historical criticism, however. Or in the Christian exegetical tradition, Vitranga’s eighteenth-century commentary on Isaiah demonstrates a firm commitment to the literal sense which is nonetheless open to figural extension. Although his massive apologetic defending biblical reference leads into the giant *cul-de-sac* described by Frei, he did resist more radical historicization of the Old Testament on the one hand (Grotius) as well as unbridled allegorization on the other (Cocceius).²⁷ Or again, Theodore, famous for finding Christ in just four or five psalms, was at times “overly literal” and could not do justice to the deep connection between the two testaments (see the stunning critique in *Struggle*, 132–33). Finally, Irenaeus helps contextualize the term rule of faith and speaks of the unity of word and apostolic tradition to Catholics and Protestants who today come to understand the theological role of the faith community in shaping the canon.²⁸ The search for “family resemblance” is nothing less than a typology of readers.

Childs makes the point explicit at least once, near the end of his Vitranga essay. For interpreters of the critical era—i.e., after the Enlightenment—he thinks

one can mount a convincing case that the present study of biblical prophecy from a hermeneutical perspective still falls roughly within these same options, namely, the rationalistic orthodoxy of Vitranga, the rationalistic agnosticism of Anthony Collins, the allegorical/typological *Heilsgeschichte* of Cocceius, and the romantic/idealistic approach of Schleiermacher. That the latter two categories have often been combined is equally clear. . . . The Reformers in the “pre-critical” era were still able to *assume* the coherence of text and historical reference. Following the challenge of the Enlightenment, this *assumption* was no longer possible. Thereafter, the biblical interpreter was forced either to be critical, anti-critical, or postcritical, but the pre-critical option has been forever lost.²⁹

The course must be forward not back (again, he is no arcadian). From this perspective a proposal like Wolterstorff’s is flawed, despite its rejection of the romantic model, because it “seems largely unaware of the sheer scope and intensity

26 Brevard Childs, “The Almost Forgotten Genesis Commentary of Benno Jacob,” in *Recht und Ethos im Alten Testament: Gestalt und Wirkung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), 273–280, here 276.

27 Brevard Childs, “Hermeneutical Reflections on C. Vitranga, Eighteenth-Century Interpreter of Isaiah,” in *In Search of True Wisdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 89–98.

28 Childs, “Speech-act Theory,” 381–82, and cf. *Struggle*.

29 Childs, “Hermeneutical Reflections on C. Vitranga,” 97–98; emphasis in original. The debt to Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (Yale University Press, 1974), is evident throughout.

of the Enlightenment's challenge to traditional Christian reading of the Bible."³⁰ Precisely this challenge must be faced. To cite yet another late article, the problem of retrospective reading is no false problem.³¹ Similarly, when Barr weighs Brueggemann against Childs to discover who is the "greater hater of the Enlightenment" (Barr hands Brueggemann the prize),³² he underestimates completely the magnitude of the challenge Childs felt. It is *because* of the Enlightenment that Reformation or patristic views cannot be simply repristinated, even though they can inform a new approach. So in the typology advanced here, from Vitranga on, all readers alike participate in forms of response to the Enlightenment, and, where they fail to satisfy, alike index a real and ongoing imperative. The apparent anachronism of setting traditional readers alongside critical concerns (e.g., Luther on two parts in Isaiah, see *Struggle*, 193) only shows a depth of conviction that attention to the diverse particulars of biblical texts, which critical scholarship helped bring into sharpest focus, has always been an exegetical concern.

Much that has been written of Childs' supposed method misses the mark: his approach is more search than method. Better analogies than, say, redaction criticism—or, for that matter, canon criticism, with which Childs has often been paired—might be found in the seventeenth century. Thus in a "study in ecumenics" offered in the *Festschrift* for James Barr, Childs considers how sharing Latin for scholarly discourse enabled a broad "interconfessional and international range" of engagement among biblical commentators.³³ Rather than an era of mere theological polemic, that generation also shared a commitment to the literal sense which supported a wide and often fruitful interaction among Catholics and Protestants. Such hallmarks suit Childs' own career eminently. Little wonder, too, for when he tells us what exegetes of any age do well, his own aspirations are usually implicit. If the alternate modes Childs refuses are equally patterned—and, granted, occasionally distorting³⁴—his comprehensive vision is all the more astonishing for its scope. What we have in Childs is an effort (struggle) to understand the Bible's

30 : Childs, "Speech-act Theory," 388.

31 Brevard Childs, "Retrospective Reading of the Old Testament Prophets," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 108/3 (1996): 362–77. In my judgment this is one of Childs' densest and most important statements. It is also *the* foundational study for his Isaiah commentary.

32 James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 553.

33 Brevard Childs, "Biblical Scholarship in the Seventeenth Century: A Study in Ecumenics," in *Language, Theology, and the Bible: Essays in Honor of James Barr*, ed. Samuel E Balentine and John Barton (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 325–33, here 326 and with reference to J. G. Dorschaeus.

34 For example, intertextuality, parallel to midrash, is eventually (there is some contrast with his early work) ruled out as a controlling framework for Christian figural reading. But is Walter Moberly really best described as one who "stands at the forefront of British scholars in developing a new form of intertextual interpretation of the OT" (Brevard Childs, "Critique of Recent Intertextual Canonical Interpretation," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 115/2 [2003]: 173–84, here 178)? It is worth puzzling over what worries motivate these claims, however.

form and function as Scripture in every generation of faith.

As for polemics, for which Childs might also be said to bear some resemblance to the seventeenth century, these are in keeping with the task to reflect on the two-part canon as a witness to the one divine redemption in Christ. “Because of this understanding of Christian scripture and its implications for Biblical Theology, this volume [*Biblical Theology*] has carried on a sustained polemic against other positions within the field which have been judged as inadequate, misleading, or outright erroneous.”³⁵ Unless we are absolutely clear about certain matters, Childs insists, old troubles will return with a vengeance.

IV. CONCLUSION

Like Karl Barth on his reading, Childs “reckoned with a serious exegetical continuity from the church’s inception through the modern era with no assumed superiority given to the latter period.”³⁶ This conviction is at the heart of his appeal for a recovery of the church’s exegetical tradition. Childs’ efforts in that direction, most notably in *Exodus* (1974) and *Struggle* (2004), form a major part of his contribution. Other parts could be outlined. I think immediately of his decades-long argument that the inner logic of Scripture’s textual authority accords with outer (i.e., later, ecclesial) construals of the same—how, in other words, Childs pays his dues to the well-represented view that our categories for Scripture ought to line up with Scripture’s own categories, insofar as that is possible.³⁷ Early on, this labor was carried out under the banner “midrash,” but the same theme appears in later work with different designations—canon above all. I think, too, of Childs’ later overtures to Christian figural reading, to which I have alluded. On at least five occasions between 1992 and 2004, Childs wrestles with what shape a multi-level reading of the Bible might take in his quest for a new paradigm. Very often Gerhard von Rad and Wilhelm Vischer crop up in this context. But the development has not been discussed here because it barely got off the ground, at least so far as I can see, and because Childs’ typology of readers already exemplifies something analogous. Words could also have been given to Childs’ major critical commentaries and his other exegeses.

Negatively, my argument instead has been that Childs is not about some of the things he is often supposed to be about. He did not inadvertently build weapons for the fundamentalist cause, nor did he engineer some enormous peace (splendid, lumbering, failed, or otherwise) between the entrenched factions. Neither did he retreat into nostalgia. The problems raised by the historical critical project were

35 Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 722.

36 Brevard Childs, “On Reclaiming the Bible for Christian Theology,” in *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 1–17, here 16.

37 See further my forthcoming dissertation, provisionally titled “‘Scripture’s Textual Authority’: The Work of Brevard Childs in International Context” (University of St. Andrews, Spring 2008). Meanwhile, see the resources available on my website, including a complete, hyperlinked bibliography of Childs’ works, at <http://www.daniel-driver.com/research/bsc.html>.

too real to him for that. More positively, I have suggested that Childs' rejection of the notion that the Enlightenment has *decisive* significance for our understanding of Scripture, a position upheld paradigmatically by Barr, maintains hope that redemption in Christ genuinely spans God's providentially ordered time. Childs studied the effects of the gospel as it was proclaimed throughout history, registering what he could of common threads in human response to the divine initiative. And in this he did not shy from identifying thwarting responses in addition to constitutive ones. Occasionally, he attempted things that had never been done before, such as writing a Biblical Theology, which had once been earnestly called for and anticipated (chiefly in Europe, where Childs spent formative years in study). But above all, in his later work, Childs points to an array of resources for the ongoing life of the church, for its renewal, many of which had been forgotten, or nearly forgotten. His memory would be well served, then, by marking his attempt to sort the exegetical tradition and to enlarge it, by cultivating his love for other giants of the past, and then by returning without too much delay to the two-part material witness that in every generation brokers transformation afresh.

Daniel Driver is completing a doctorate on Brevard Childs at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, and will teach on the Old Testament at Tyndale University College, Canada, starting this fall.

BOOK REVIEWS

Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible, London: SCM Press, 2006, pp. 320. \$29.99 (hardcover)

Jaroslav Pelikan's passing in May 2006 after struggling with lung cancer was a huge loss to Christian scholarship. Pelikan was a prodigious scholar of church history, and thus it is only fitting that after decades of historical work, his final publication is a biblical commentary on the one book dedicated to the life of the early church. That said, this is a most unusual commentary—quite clearly the product of Pelikan's distinguished academic career and his personal "return" (as he put it) to the Orthodox Church in 1998. While brimming with rich historical and theological knowledge, this first book in the Brazos Theological Commentary of the Bible series has a number of major limitations.

In his preface to the series as a whole, R. R. Reno says that the commentary series "advances upon the assumption that the Nicene tradition, in all its diversity and controversy, provides the proper basis for the interpretation of the Bible as Christian Scripture" (13-14). Pelikan has taken this assumption to heart. He orders his commentary of the Acts of the Apostles according to eighty-four *loci communes* (three per chapter), some of which are taken directly from the Nicene Creed. A brief survey of the table of contents reveals that this is not just a *theological* commentary, but a truly *catholic* and *orthodox* (in both senses of these words) commentary. So, for example, the commentary covers, *inter alia*, the following topics: "Mary the Theotokos," "The Twelve and the Primacy of Peter," "Incarnation and *Theosis*," "Canon Law—Its Legitimacy and Its Limits," "Apostolic Tradition and Apostolic Dogma," and "The Component 'Parts of Penance.'"

It is difficult at times to know whether one should really call this book a commentary *by* Pelikan, since throughout he allows the church fathers to provide the commentary. As a historian, and not a biblical scholar or theologian, this is understandable. In a way, Pelikan functions less as a historian and more as a medium, channeling the voices of the past as they bear upon the text. Some of the key figures include Irenaeus, John Chrysostom, Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus. And so we read statements like, "one could observe with Chrysostom" (124), or, "as Clement of Alexandria argued" (131-32). The living presence of the tradition is this commentary's greatest strength. By allowing the doctors of the church to speak freely, Pelikan reminds us of the profound insights of the ancient church and helps to liberate us from what C. S. Lewis called "chronological snobbery."

Of course, this book is thoroughly Pelikan's work, and some of the sections of theological commentary demonstrate his theological and historical insight. His discussion of the Holy Spirit (48-53) brilliantly connects the Spirit to the idea of fullness (e.g., fullness of time, fullness of joy, fullness of grace, fullness of the Spirit). His best reflections are also the most unexpected. He examines the role that humor plays throughout the book of Acts while looking at the story of

Rhoda from Acts 12:13-16 (148-50), and in another section he looks at the use of nautical imagery (286-89). In a comment on Acts 21:13-14 (226-30), Pelikan offers an analysis of the “religious affections” in Luke-Acts, in which Augustine and Schleiermacher both make an appearance. Perhaps the single best section is entitled “*De amicitia: The Divine Gift of Friendship*” (283-86). Here Pelikan presents a constructive theology of friendship in theses which range from the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas to the way friendship is grounded in Christ and imitates the God who befriends humanity. In a particularly poignant section, Pelikan reflects on “the predicament of the Christian historian” (279-83), who is caught between scientific objectivity and religious fidelity. The book closes with a fine discussion of the kingdom of God (292-95).

Pelikan’s commentary, however, has some serious limitations. The problem is best summarized by Pelikan himself in a comment on Acts 8:30-31: “It is the consensus of Orthodox and Catholic teaching that the continuing apostolic witness of the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as this has been set forth in tradition, liturgy, and creed, performs the same function for the interpretation of the ‘Scripture’ (now consisting of both the Old and the New Testament) as it did for the ‘Scripture’ when this consisted of only the Old Testament” (116). The problem is that Pelikan has interpreted “theological commentary” to mean “commentary in accordance with the dogmas of the ancient church.” He thus follows Reno’s advice in a hyper-literal fashion: the Nicene tradition *determines* his exegesis. According to the index, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed has more entries than anything or anyone else other than Christ himself (310).

What all this means in practice is that Pelikan has limited and conformed his exegesis to fit the strict parameters authorized by the Tradition. This results in numerous examples of blatant *eisegesis*, and it also threatens to make this commentary all but irrelevant to pastors and constructive theologians. As a good Orthodox Christian, Pelikan has no interest in being creative. His only concern is to be faithful to the past, and thus faithful to the church. Not surprisingly, he introduces the book by stating up front that “this commentary, then, is based on what may turn out to be the most radical presupposition of all: that the church really did get it right in its liturgies, creeds, and councils—yes, and even in its dogmas” (28). In the transition from “apostolic church” to “church catholic,” he claims, “the church somehow continued to be ‘apostolic’” (28).

That this presupposition is by no means obvious to most Christians today is surely an understatement. As a result of this ecclesial loyalty, Pelikan fails on numerous occasions to be faithful to the text. The most inexplicable example is the fact that Acts 1:8—the one-sentence summary or thesis of the entire book—receives no mention at all. Pelikan actually avoids the topic of witness and mission altogether, other than a very brief analysis of the word “witness” (56). Amazingly, in a commentary on Acts, there is no section devoted to the missionary task or the apostolic mission, and there is no entry for “mission” in the index. This exegetical failure is less surprising when one realizes, in light of Pelikan’s introduction, that this commentary is really a sustained argument that the institutional, post-Constantinian church is fundamentally consistent with the apostolic church

as documented by Luke. Unfortunately, this results in some strange readings and distortions of the biblical material.

Some of the most jarring interpretations include the following: commenting on the light which blinded Paul on the road to Damascus, Pelikan proceeds to talk about Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox doctrine of the divine energy, represented here, he argues, as light (234-36); in an example of exegetical gymnastics, he moves from talking about the pagan beliefs that Paul and Barnabus encountered at Lystra to a discussion of the Greek doctrine of *theosis* (162-64); at the end of a discussion about the unity of humanity before God, Pelikan slips in a comment about the Holy Spirit “establish[ing] national churches” (133); and, finally, the most jarring example of *eisegesis* occurs in his presentation of the Mars Hill episode, which Pelikan introduces with the title: “Apophatic Theology: Negation as the Affirmation of Metaphysical Transcendence” (193-96). Moreover, throughout the book, he refers to the “college of apostles,” while Mary is always “Mary the Theotokos,” or the “Blessed Virgin Mary.” In short, it is clear that Pelikan is perfectly comfortable reading history *back into* the text, because for him, Scripture and Tradition are equally authoritative: each interprets the other. What is not acceptable, it seems, is any critique of the church on the basis of Scripture. The Bible upholds and must not challenge the *status quo*. He even goes so far as to call the imperial enforcement of dogma by Caesar “innovative” and “revolutionary” (184).

The book also lacks an accurate index. Throughout the book John Chrysostom appears in almost every chapter, yet the index lists him only twice. It became clear that the book missed a number of entries when the name did not appear in the body of the text itself and was only referenced in a footnote. For example, the Belgic Confession is mentioned on page 159, footnote 11, but receives no entry in the index. In a book which relies so heavily upon historical sources, a faulty index is a huge disservice to the reader. Hopefully, this will be corrected in future printings.

(On a side note, readers of this issue of the *Princeton Theological Review* will be interested in knowing that, according to Pelikan himself, the editors of the Brazos Commentary series gave him explicit instructions to base the commentary “upon the final form of the text, taken in its canonical context.” Such a statement immediately brings to mind the work of Brevard Childs, who is clearly an influence upon this Brazos series.)

Despite its shortcomings, Jaroslav Pelikan has left us with a work of impressive scholarship and ecclesial fidelity. His commentary on Acts is a promising start to what I expect will be a landmark commentary series. In this rich and detailed text, Pelikan has given new meaning to the words of Chrysostom, “Paul is sailing even now with us” (288).

David W. Congdon
Princeton Theological Seminary
Princeton, NJ

John L. Thompson, *Reading the Bible With the Dead: What You Can Learn From the History of Exegesis That You Can't Learn From Exegesis Alone*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007, pp. xi + 324. \$20.00 (paperback)

On almost any account, the recovery of the theological interpretation of Scripture involves a return to the ecclesial location of the interpreting community and a concern with the history of that community's engagement with Scripture. In *Reading the Bible With the Dead*, John L. Thompson, professor of historical theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, has provided just such a demonstration of the ethical and theological benefit of approaching Scripture through the tradition of its interpretation.

With one eye on the set of difficult biblical texts commonly censored by modern lectionaries, Thompson begins by noting the problem of preaching these uncomfortable passages. After all, he asks, when was the last time you heard a sermon on Jephthah's daughter or the gang-rape and brutal murder of the Levite's concubine, much less a "good" sermon? (2). Feminist exegetes have called attention to the culture of patriarchy and violence that so often surfaces in the Bible, and modern readers are understandably inclined to tiptoe past such possible textual stumbling blocks – a penitence of denial or willful ignorance. Nevertheless, Thompson reminds us, contemporary readers are not the first to stumble on these particular stones, and he offers the history of exegesis on difficult texts as a means to rehabilitate their use in and for the church.

The bulk of the book is comprised of nine chapters concerned with this history of engagement. Thompson certainly cannot be accused of side-stepping difficult passages; in the course of the study, he reviews Hagar's expulsion by Abraham, the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter, the imprecatory psalms, the immoralities of the patriarchs, Gomer's marriage to Hosea, Paul's cryptic statements about women in 1 Corinthians 11, divorce, Eve's role in the fall, and various Old Testament narratives about rape, violence and sexual coercion. A thorny lot of passages indeed, passages whose interpretation in the church calls for nothing short of an act of bravery – or, perhaps, strong allies equal to the task. Thompson finds such allies especially in the patristic and Reformation commentary traditions (especially in writings in Latin; one might have liked to see more of those Fathers who wrote in Greek or even Syriac).

Each chapter has a roughly common structure: the problem of the text in question is sharply posed, often with reference to contemporary readers. Several key aspects of interpretation are identified, and Thompson explores the various ways in which these questions were answered. Each chapter closes with three or four lessons to be learned for contemporary interpreters. One striking aspect of this survey is Thompson's portrayal of how often ancient, medieval and Reformation-era readers *were* troubled by the same issues that trouble us today, though not always with the same degree of shock or sensitivity that we might like. It also becomes clear that any particular problem was susceptible to a variety of competing solutions, that even commentators in broad agreement about a "rule of faith" were not constrained to alleviate difficulties in homogeneous ways. A chief virtue

of this book is that it is not content to present simply the results of exegesis, but focuses explicitly on how such results were attained (although the discussions are often necessarily short because of the amount of ground to be covered).

Of course, as Thompson well recognizes, precedence is not the same as propriety, and there are plenty of instances when the pre-critical commentators he surveys should themselves be criticized. Nonetheless, it is, he reminds us, unfair to judge them by the standards of a later age, and it would be a pity to forfeit such a rich heritage because we cannot bring ourselves to overlook their faults and extend to them a charitable reading. Even though the role of the history of exegesis is not hermeneutically straightforward in our attempts to read Scripture today, to learn to interpret the Bible in a way that is in some sense answerable to the rich and varied tradition of the “great cloud of witnesses” who have preceded us is an urgent task. As ever more proponents of theological exegesis seek to rouse modern interpreters from their Cartesian slumber, the history of exegesis is too important to neglect.

Finally, the conclusion underlines the importance of the study and suggests some practical steps by which busy pastors and educated laity might integrate the history of exegesis into their personal engagement with Scripture – a goal facilitated by the inclusion of a helpful appendix of English translations of commentary literature before 1600. Thompson also maintains a supporting website with example sermons, updated bibliography, and other helpful links (<http://purl.oclc.org/net/jlt/exegesis>).

In short, this sympathetic and accessible treatment of the history of exegesis should be read by pastors and exegetes alike. To know this history does not solve our theological or hermeneutical dilemmas, but grants our modern conversations and debates a richness and breadth of perspective they would otherwise lack.

David Lincicum
Keble College, Oxford

Daniel J. Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God: Toward Theology as Wisdom*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006, pp. xvi + 278. \$30.00 (paperback)

In this revised edition of his dissertation conducted under Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Daniel J. Treier – associate professor of theology at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois – has issued a challenge to both church and academy, urging them to re-conceive theology and its task. Theology has for too long been sequestered away in the “schools,” where it has become disconnected from the ecclesial community with its practices and its use of Scripture. In contrast to understanding theology as an abstract or theoretical discipline, it ought to be understood as a practical one interested in developing persons capable of “living virtuously in communion with God” (202).

This volume ranges wide in its treatment of these topics. Part I deals with

“Education and the Nature of Theology,” discussing the relation of *sapientia* and *scientia* in the modern and pre-modern worlds, the relation between *scientia* and semantics in postmodernity, wisdom in the biblical text and theological tradition, various theories of doctrine and especially doctrine understood in relation to communicative practice, and concluding with a discussion of the theological interpretation of Scripture. Part II addresses “Interpretation and the Nature of Wisdom,” and it is here that Treier shows his command of the scholarly literature dealing with hermeneutics in general and biblical hermeneutics in particular. This is especially seen in his discussion of biblical interpretation and postmodernism, as well as in another discussion of the theological interpretation of Scripture in conversation with the concept of *phronesis*. Part III seeks to synthesize the previous material by considering “Education and Interpretation.” Here *phronesis* is discussed in relation to *wissenschaft* and *paideia*.

One of the primary themes of this volume is theology’s double aspect; namely, its relation to God and its relation to the Christian community. Both of these aspects have been seriously questioned or uncritically emphasized in various quarters. Treier’s goal is to bring these aspects together into a functional whole. With reference to God, theology represents “communicative responses to God’s transforming voice, heard in and through Scripture” (206). With reference to the community, “theological activity results in a transformative sort of knowledge” (63) and develops wise, virtuous community members.

Treier’s style is lucid and his argumentation is cogent. An extensive bibliography provides direction for further research while elaborations and further technical discussion in the endnotes are often helpful. All of this makes *Virtue and the Voice of God* a valuable guide to thinking through the nature and function of theology in the Christian life.

W. Travis McMaken
Princeton Theological Seminary
Princeton, NJ

Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce Metzger (Eds.), *The UBS Greek New Testament: A Reader’s Edition*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007, pp. xi + 704. \$69.95

With the widespread availability of bible software tools, fewer and fewer students are becoming fluent in the Greek of the New Testament. Many students opt for classes which teach them to use tools which get at the original biblical languages and provide access to commentaries and lexicons, without setting about the task of becoming fluent in the language itself. The United Bible Societies are concerned about the diminishing number of persons able to read the biblical languages. Consequently, they have published *The UBS Greek New Testament: A Readers Edition*. The goal of this volume is to provide minimum help to aid students and scholars in mastering the skill of continuous reading in the Greek

New Testament.

The *Reader's Edition* boasts a variety of strengths in helping to achieve the goal of sustained reading. Most important is Barclay M. Newman's running Greek-English dictionary at the bottom of each page. With the exception of personal names which are easily sounded out, every word that occurs thirty times or less is footnoted providing both parsing and a contextual translation. Idioms are also explained in the footnotes, and difficult forms are analyzed grammatically. The reader will find it easy to move between the text and the lexical notes at the bottom of the page. The *Reader's Edition* also has a lexicon at the back containing the words that occur more than 30 times. Thus, this edition provides a translation of every word in the New Testament enabling the student to read continuously without consulting other sources. The text is that of *The Greek New Testament: Fourth revised edition* which matches the text of the *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*. So, the reader will later be able to move from the *Reader's Edition* to the critical editions of the Greek New Testament without difficulty. The color maps from the *UBS Greek New Testament* have been included as well. There is no text critical apparatus except a few symbols to indicate disputed words. The result is a page that includes only what is needed for intermediate or higher students to read the Greek text of the New Testament.

As noted above, the glosses in the footnotes are contextualized. This is a strength in that it provides instant and clear reading. However, it may also be considered a weakness if the reader grows accustomed to certain traditional readings that may be better rendered differently. To its credit, this edition does include alternate definitions when there are substantial differences of scholarly opinion about the meaning of a word. Even if the contextual glosses are occasionally weak, they do not hinder the achievement of the publication's goal, namely, to enable intermediate students to read the Greek New Testament.

The hardback format is sturdy and large. The book measures 6.22 x 9.33 inches. I would prefer a smaller edition, but the size of this book would not keep me from purchasing and enjoying it. Another weakness is the thin pages. Not only are the words on the other side of the page visible through the page, but the words on the next page are visible as well. This may prove distracting to some. However, I have found that the eyes quickly adjust and remain undistracted by the words on the next page.

As a second year Greek student, I have found the *Reader's Edition* to be highly motivating. Never before have I spent as much time in the text of the Greek New Testament. For the first time I have been able to read straight through an entire book of the Bible in the original language. This is great motivation to use this text for study and devotion. This tool will enable the student with a first year understanding of biblical Greek to begin to live in the Greek New Testament. It will prove an important tool for pastors and especially for students who plan to become expert in Greek for the pursuit of scholarship. The *Reader's Edition* meets a significant need in the world of biblical studies. It will enable students of Koine Greek to become familiar with the documents in the original language at an earlier stage of study than has been previously available. I highly recommend

this volume to those eager to learn to read the Greek of the New Testament. It is an invaluable tool.

Matthew P. O'Reilly
Asbury Theological Seminary
Wilmore, KY

Steven J. Keillor, *God's Judgments: Interpreting History and the Christian Faith*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007, pp. 233. \$18.00 (paperback)

In an issue dedicated to “theological exegesis,” a review of a book by an historian may seem out of place. The efforts of other contributors to understand scripture in a distinctly theological manner, however, and the effort of Steven J. Keillor in *God's Judgments: Interpreting History and the Christian Faith* to utilize the category of divine judgment to construct a theological interpretation of history, both involve “theological exegesis,” though in each case the object of this exegesis differs.

God's Judgments was inspired when Keillor noticed a “kind of gag rule” (13) that seemingly prohibited evangelicals from discussing God’s role, and particularly the possibility of God’s judgment, in the 9/11 attacks. He blames this deficiency on “worldview thinking,” which Keillor claims is “a dominant concept in evangelical circles.” In his quest to restore the category of judgment to Christian historical analysis, then, Keillor writes explicitly to “evangelicals,” and argues “for a partial reversal of the prevalent notion that Christianity is a worldview” (14).

Keillor’s counter-thesis is that “Christianity is an interpretation of history” in the sense of “an old-fashioned metanarrative” (15). But even more, Christianity is “faith in a person, Jesus Christ” who is the true “meaning of history,” rescuing it “from its calamities and its corrosive, destructive ebbs and flows that are forms of divine judgment” (17). Judgment is defined biblically with appeal to the Hebrew word *mishpat*, which Keillor roughly takes to signify a slow “sifting out” process. Judgment is not necessarily a “final, curtain-dropping event”; it can also be “a lengthy process with God as an active investigator testing people’s hearts, giving the wicked a chance to repent and the righteous [a chance] to fall away” (17).

The first two chapters of *God's Judgments* focus on September 11th, surveying how various magazines and prominent figures portrayed the event’s meaning (chapter 1) and potential as judgment (chapter 2). Keillor concludes that the offered interpretations fail, and, seeking “a more explicitly Christian and a more nuanced view” of the tragedy, he launches into his critique of “the dominant idea of Christianity as worldview” (46).

Despite the efforts of Christian thinkers to redeem worldview thinking, Keillor charges that it remains simply “an answer to questions the knowing self

poses about *other things* besides its own guilt” (52). In contrast to a worldview philosophy, Keillor argues that “Scripture’s testimony is that guilty humanity has been, is being and will be tried and judged in a stream of events it cannot control, end or avoid” (53-54). Keillor finds this testimony in the Old Testament, particularly its “oracles against the nations” (chapter 4), and argues that it is not negated in the New and is employed by early Christian historians like Eusebius and Augustine (chapter 5). Indeed, in both Old and New Testament, Keillor locates a common element that offers a “central meaning that can anchor our interpretation” of U.S. History – the Son of Man, whose “heights-to-depths-to-heights trajectory” gives us the context in which to examine God’s judgments in U.S. history” (103) (chapter 6).

With these theological underpinnings in place, Keillor proceeds to evaluate the role of judgment in the 1814 Burning of Washington (chapter 7) and the Civil War (Chapters 8 and 9). Keillor’s methodology, explicitly stated in his chapter on the Burning of Washington, but also in play when discussing the Civil War, starts “from our scriptural presupposition ... that this crisis likely was a divine judgment” and then looks to “see if that idea makes sense or helps to explain events” (103-104). This method leads him where he expects it will. In the case of the 1814 burning, “the disaster’s focus on the elites, its embarrassing nature and its relative exemption of ordinary Americans (except in Washington) does point toward divine judgment” on the nation’s “gentlemen-founders” (118). In the case of the Civil war, the “testimony of contemporaries who predicted judgment in the form of civil war, who experienced the war as judgment and who looked back on it as one” help confirm its status as judgment (121). These chapters also summarize some of the important events leading up to the conflicts, events that Keillor concludes are part of God’s “sifting out.”

Keiller broadens his discussion of judgment in past events to include contemporary issues. Chapter 11 argues that worldview analysis has failed in discussions of bioethics, and that Christians need to employ judgment in the public debate over “attempts to redesign human beings” (171). Judgment also applies to contemporary politics: as chapter 12 argues, the “complicated interactions of moral and budget politics in the past thirty years” (191) are one area where this judgment can be seen.

Several minor criticisms can be leveled against *God’s Judgments*. For example, at times the book seems repetitive (for instance, much of chapter 10, on the loss of “judgment” language in broader culture, could have been incorporated into chapter 3). At other times Keillor leans too heavily on secondary sources. Perhaps the most interesting discussion surrounding *God’s Judgments*, however, is its genre. Keillor repeatedly refers to himself as a historian, but when he claims to “correlate known causes of the event with known categories of divine holiness and judgment” (72) most historians would hesitate – how are these categories known? They are known, if Keillor’s analysis is correct, through Scripture – through revelation, which raises the question of the extent to which historians can legitimately use revelation in their historical analysis.

Keillor could of course respond that he is not writing to historians (though

he claims to write as one), but to evangelicals. But then one wonders if his book really speaks to the issues with which contemporary evangelicals are wrestling. By taking “worldview thinking” as his “debating partner,” Keillor seems, to some extent, to be beating a dead horse. This thinking is not nearly “so predominant” (14) as he implies; indeed, for better or for worse, just as “rational ideas and . . . worldview thinking” have significantly declined in “their market value, their status and impact in society” (185), so they have among evangelicals.

Perhaps the key to resolving this difficulty is to conclude that Keillor is not writing simply to historians, nor even to evangelicals, but, more generally, to Christians who think about history. To this audience, Keillor offers a timely reminder: God is still active in today’s world and indeed still judges it. Humanly speaking, this judgment may not be discernible, but it is still there, and by God’s grace it can serve as a call to repentance.

David Komline
Princeton Theological Seminary
Princeton, NJ

Neil B. MacDonald, *Metaphysics and the God of Israel: Systematic Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006, pp. xxiv + 248. \$24.99

There is a buzz in the theological academic community regarding theological exegesis. Shots are fired over the theologian’s bow from biblical scholars: “Be more biblical.” Theologians return the favor by calling out the reductive sensibilities of biblical scholars: “Let your biblical studies be more theological.” What has resulted is an inordinate amount of attention given to methodology. Will we be forever only talking about method with little attention given to actually doing it? And then there is Neil MacDonald’s book *Metaphysics and the God of Israel*.

MacDonald’s work is a *tour de force* of biblical theological reflection, the three sides of MacDonald coming together with combustive force: theologian, biblical critic and analytic philosopher. His interlocutors range from Aquinas, Barth, Jenson, and Swinburne to von Rad and Noth to Kant, Kripke, and Einstein. And this is merely the beginning of the impressive scope of thinkers and ideas MacDonald engages with clarity and verve. Those most influential on MacDonald are Brevard Childs, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Richard Bauckham, and above all, according to MacDonald, Christopher Seitz. The reason for mentioning these names is simply to indicate what sort of book this is: it is an extended scholarly engagement with the big thoughts of modernity (philosophical and theological/biblical critical) and how the revelation of YHWH and Jesus Christ sheds light on the problems of modernity (and post-modernity). In fairness, his book needs to be reviewed by those competent in all three fields, and it is not entirely clear which side of MacDonald tends to remain in the driver’s seat. My hunch is that it is the analytic philosopher.

The book is divided into three parts. It begins with YHWH as revealed in the creation narratives and specifically the sixth and seventh days of creation (Part I). Here MacDonald, taking his cue from Childs, emphasizes the important role the Priestly writer plays in the shaping of the final form of Israel's Scriptures. Though Israel's initial historical engagement with YHWH takes place in the Exodus event, the Priestly writer places the creation narratives at the beginning to set the limits and trajectory for exactly who this God is who rescues Israel and makes her his own. Of particular importance here, and in the book as a whole, is MacDonald's philosophical explanation of how God can be creator and at the same time "get himself into" the space and time of his covenant people. The answer: *God does so on the basis of his own self-determination*. For MacDonald, this fact is a "basic action," that is, it is irreducible and foundational for all that follows. There is much more that needs to be addressed here, e.g., MacDonald's lofty discussion of space and time, his engagement and appropriation of Wolterstorff's and Jenson's insistence that immeasurable time as opposed to timeless eternity is predicated on God, his very interesting move that places the "basic action" of God's creation as an *ad intra* move (God does something to himself) before his *ad extra* "Let there be light," and much, much more.

Part II deals with the Deuteronomist history where YHWH is revealed as a judging, yet desisting, forbearing self. Here MacDonald engages questions regarding the identity of Yahweh from within Israel's own faith-construal of her history (emic as opposed to etic). Particularly insightful here is MacDonald's resuscitation of *experience* and the role it plays in Christian theology. At the same time, however, he registers and appropriates the criticism of experience found in figures such as Barth and Lindbeck.

Part III moves to the New Testament and the identity (as opposed to abstract notions of 'nature') of Jesus Christ. It is in light of the identity of YHWH found in the creation narratives and Deuteronomistic history that MacDonald moves to the New Testament. MacDonald finds in Barth's narrative portrayal of Jesus Christ's identity a salient and enduring insight. In the synoptics, Jesus is identified as the judge who is then judged in our place (MacDonald's preference for the judicial understanding of substitutionary atonement is observed here). The surprising news of the Gospels is that, in Jesus, YHWH the judge has taken his own judgment on himself. The abstraction of the identity of Jesus Christ from YHWH revealed in Israel's canonical Scriptures is a problem MacDonald seeks to right. In other words, the Old Testament is the front wheels of MacDonald's "front wheel drive" biblical theology.

There is much worthy of engagement in MacDonald's work, and without doubt readers will take issue with various points: his possible over-dependence on historical-critical conclusions (e.g., JEDP), his emphasis that the New Testament is to be understood by the Old Testament's plain sense (a claim of assured importance) without the dialectical emphasis that the New Testament also informs our reading of the Old Testament (Childs would claim as much when he uses language such as 'retrospective reading of the Old Testament prophets'), his nuanced affirmation of the *communicatio idiomatum* (Jesus Christ, the one hypostasis, is

in the particular space of YHWH), and much more. But all of this witnesses to the enthusiasm and energy this book can and should engender.

It is not an easy read, mind you, and MacDonald demands much from his readers. Owen's preface to *The Death of Death* is *à propos* here: "If thou intendest to go any farther, I would entreat thee to stay here a little. If thou art, as many in this pretending age, *a sign or title gazer*, and comest into books as Cato into the theatre, to go out again, — thou hast had thy entertainment; farewell!" This reviewer hopes many will not bid "farewell" to MacDonald's tome. It sparkles with the hope of the "something other" that so many of us have been looking for in theological exegesis.

Mark Gignilliat
Beeson Divinity School, Samford University
Birmingham, AL

Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible, London: SCM Press, 2007, pp. 272. \$29.99 (hardcover)

Scholarship within the biblical studies guild is characteristically marked by arduous historical effort, an enterprise that strives to reconstruct a given text's original thought world in order to ascertain its meaning for its intended audience. While biblical scholars may keep an eye toward contemporary application, their primary task is to faithfully interpret an author's work in its historical context; their aim is to write about an author and a text. In a certain sense, their undertaking is analogous to that of art historians who seek to write about a composer and a composition. Biblical scholars analyze a text's grammar, structural organization, contextual meaning, etc.; similarly, art historians examine a painting's brush strokes, artistic influences, later restorations and so on, all the while endeavoring to understand a painting in its original context. The primary task of each field is to write *about* composers and compositions.

In his theological commentary on Matthew's Gospel, Stanley Hauerwas employs exegesis of another sort with different goals and a distinct frame of reference. Hauerwas writes under the assumption that "Matthew has told us what we need to know to be transformed into a follower of Jesus" (20). Hauerwas endeavors not to write *about* Matthew so much as to write *alongside* Matthew. Inasmuch as he thinks alongside Matthew, Hauerwas moves in a different direction than historical studies and becomes somewhat of an artist himself. He joins the throngs of those throughout Christian history who have sought to understand who Jesus is and what it means to follow Jesus not only in first century Palestine, but also—and primarily—in their own age and in their own culture. Writing as one who recognizes that he has no direct access to Jesus apart from Christianity's rich theological heritage, he treats Matthew's Gospel as Matthew's portrait of Jesus and what it means to follow him. Hauerwas correspondingly looks to Matthew's Gospel not as his source of theological inspiration so much as a school of disciple-

ship to which he must submit in order to master the art of following Jesus. Hauerwas' commentary endeavors to paint a portrait of discipleship in the twenty-first century that is faithful to and formed by Matthew's academy of discipleship.

Consequently, Hauerwas is not afraid to "read our lives into the story that Matthew tells" (21). In fact, this is what makes this theological commentary stand out from others. Throughout this work, Hauerwas intentionally writes in such a way as to allow readers to make connections between Matthew's text and their lives; this is part of what Hauerwas believes makes this commentary theological (19). After briefly recounting his study of Matthew, he writes: "But finally I realized I simply had to write what I thought should be said in and for our time. Accordingly I have tried not to write about Matthew. I have tried to write with Matthew, assuming that the gospel was written for us" (18). Matthew's goal is to form disciples. For that reason, "This commentary on the gospel of Matthew is meant, therefore, to do no more than to call attention to what Matthew has done so well, that is, to position the reader to be a follower of Jesus" (26). Each of Hauerwas' chapters, which chronologically correspond to Matthew's, demonstrates continuity between Matthew's demands of the first century church and the text's claims upon the twenty-first century church. Perhaps Hauerwas' most significant contribution to the emerging genre of theological commentaries is found in his emphasis of Matthew's role in the church's communal life throughout the ages and his hope that his commentary be "read as the theology of the church" (21).

Along these lines lies the greatest danger thinking alongside Matthew poses: Hauerwas' thoughts may well replace or overshadow Matthew's. Writing with instead of about Matthew inevitably means that Hauerwas' thoughts—even if they closely follow, are in conversation with, and are formed by Matthew's text—are still distinctly *Hauerwas'* thoughts. While certainly true of any commentator, the peril is more immanent in a work that endeavors to think alongside a biblical author. For example, in his seventh chapter he discusses Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative alongside Jesus' "Golden Rule," contrasting modern ethical systems that are profoundly engrained in American culture with the type of ethic Jesus demands. Hauerwas uses Kant's categorical imperative, which has no place in the first century, to draw out the meaning of following Jesus in the twenty-first century. The success of pulling Jesus' teachings into American life not only depends upon Hauerwas' interpretation of Matthew, but also upon his rendering of American culture, and, at times, an interpretive lens such as Kant. While there is certainly room for disagreeing with Hauerwas' construal of Matthew and his assessment of American culture, his considerations that connect Matthew to a contemporary audience are well-crafted, insightful, and cannot be dismissed easily. All will appreciate the conviction, clarity, and profundity with which he writes; some of Hauerwas' opponents might even find themselves reassessing previous disagreements in light of Hauerwas' close conversation with Matthew. This commentary might also be of particular interest to Hauerwas enthusiasts since it demonstrates a deep-seated biblical foundation for a great deal of his previous work. Shapes and contours of his theology that have never been explicitly linked in other writings are also brought together in this one volume.

Yet recurring themes from earlier works in this new biblical context might raise red flags for some. Hauerwas writes: "I have... tried to avoid making every text in Matthew conform to a singular agenda. I do stress the politics of Matthew as well as the role of nonviolence in Jesus' ministry, but I hope I have avoided making the political character of Matthew 'what Matthew is all about'" (20). While Hauerwasian themes certainly pervade this text, they do not have an overly polemical bent. Hauerwas never forces Matthew's Gospel to conform to his previous work nor does he permit a "singular agenda" or theme to domineer his commentary or overshadow Matthew's multi-faceted account of Jesus' ministry. While he does relate most Matthean themes to Christian living, he does so only out of the conviction that Matthew intends his readers to be trained "to be a follower of Jesus through the reading of the gospel" (26); as such, the subject of Christian living should not be misconstrued as a "singular agenda" but rather looked upon as practical applications of Matthew's multiple agendas. Even while taking great caution, well-known Hauerwasian themes inevitably creep up in unexpected places. For example, non-violence is mentioned twice while discussing Matthew's genealogy. While a definite difficulty, this is only one of but a few instances in which Hauerwas' theological convictions overwhelm Matthew's text. On the whole, Hauerwas certainly proves to be Matthew's faithful interpreter.

While most commentaries strive to connect contemporary readers to the first century, Hauerwas also gives heed to Matthew's vast interpretive history, a noteworthy achievement. He consistently engages patristic, medieval, and modern theologians to evoke important conversation between Matthew's Gospel and Christianity's rich theological heritage. While Hauerwas certainly keeps an eye toward ancient thought, his primary task is to demonstrate Matthew's significance to contemporary Western culture. Therefore readers should not be surprised to discover that Hauerwas copiously quotes contemporary theologians such as Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and John Howard Yoder who concern themselves with the sort of present-day discipleship dilemmas Hauerwas seeks to confront.

Some might consider the prominence Hauerwas gives to such Christian thinkers as surpassing Matthew's importance in this work, thinking they, not Matthew or Jesus, are the commentary's "stars." Such a critique would be valid if Hauerwas were writing *about* instead of *with* Matthew. Instead of textual associations, readers should look for thematic continuity between Hauerwas' discourse and Matthew's Gospel. Hauerwas himself realizes that "readers may find at times that they are not sure where I am in the text, but I hope that will make their reading more interesting" (19). Hauerwas obviously structures his discourse to coincide with Matthew's, and, though Matthew's text may take a back seat, Hauerwas' narrative is consistently driven by Matthean themes. To ensure readers do not miss the thematic connections Hauerwas so carefully lays out, he encourages readers to read Matthew's chapter, his corresponding chapter, and "then reread Matthew's chapter" in hopes that "the second reading will be illumined by the commentary" (19).

Anyone wishing to become acquainted with theological exegesis should consider this volume. Hauerwas offers a fresh perspective on Matthew that is ab-

errantly insightful, colorful, compelling, and powerful. Well-written, fast-paced, and accessible to laity, Hauerwas delivers thoughtful and thought-provoking conversation between Matthew's gospel and American culture that aims to do no more than "position the reader to be a follower of Jesus."

Thomas Seat
Princeton Theological Seminary
Princeton, NJ

CALL FOR PAPERS

You are invited to submit an article, reflection, or book review for publication in the fall 2008 issue of the *Princeton Theological Review*, a tribute to Scottish theologian **Thomas F. Torrance**.

T.F. Torrance was born to missionary parents in 1913 and grew up in West China and Lanarkshire, Scotland. Profoundly influenced by his teacher, Karl Barth, he would later supervise the translation of Barth's thirteen-volume *Church Dogmatics* and become a leading exponent of his mentor. Torrance served 10 years as a parish minister and taught church history and dogmatic theology at New College, University of Edinburgh from 1950-1979. In the last decades of his life he produced an extensive scholarly output on topics ranging from theology and science, Trinitarian theology, and the person and work of Jesus Christ. He died in December 2007, leaving a legacy for Reformed theologians and the church at large.

You are also invited to submit an article, reflection, or book review for publication in the spring 2009 issues of the *Princeton Theological Review*, on the *Analogia Entis*.

Submissions for the fall must be received by September 15, 2008. Submissions for spring must be received by January 15, 2009. Please send them by e-mail attachment to ptr@ptsem.edu. For submissions, subscriptions, and more information, please visit our website: www.princetontheologicalreview.org.

THE PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

David Komline, MDiv Senior

GENERAL EDITORS

David Congdon, MDiv Senior

Han-luen Kantzer Komline, MDiv Senior

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

Peter Kline, MDiv Middler

COPY EDITOR

Daniel Escher, MDiv Middler

PRODUCTION MANAGERS

Paranee Sun, MDiv Middler

David Drebes, MDiv Senior

WEBMASTER

Chris TerryNelson, MDiv Middler

FINANCIAL MANAGER

Meagan Cracraft, MDiv Senior

SUBSCRIPTIONS MANAGER

David Berge, MDiv Middler

PUBLICITY MANAGER

Colleen Nelson, MDiv Middler

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Sarah Bogue, MDiv Junior

Matthew Bollinger, MDiv Junior

Nicholas DiDonato, MDiv Junior

Miriam Diephouse, MDiv Junior

Daniel Escher, MDiv Middler

Melinda Hall, MDiv Junior

Yvette Joy Harris, MDiv Junior

Benjamin Heidgerken, MDiv Junior

Cambria Janae Kaltwasser, MDiv Junior

Colleen Nelson, MDiv Middler

Matthew Puffer, MDiv Middler

James Rienstra, MDiv Junior

Nicole Rienstra, MDiv Junior

Darren Sumner, MDiv Middler

Christopher TerryNelson, MDiv Middler

Iliana Wood, MDiv Junior

